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*Tutwiler*

# A PRODIGAL SON.

BY

DUTTON COOK,

AUTHOR OF

“PAUL FOSTER’S DAUGHTER.”

“A lytel misgoyng in the gynning causeth mykel errour in the end.”

—CHAUCER’S “TESTAMENT OF LOVE.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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## A PRODIGAL SON.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### MR. PHILLIMORE'S FIRST FLOOR.

NEARLY two years have passed since Mr. Fuller's daughter Violet left Grilling Abbots Church, the wife of Wilford Hadfield. Time has very little changed her. If possible, her beauty has been enhanced by her new position. A wife and a mother, she now possesses claims for admiration even more remarkable than those of pretty Miss Fuller of Grilling Abbots. And Mr. Phillimore's judgment was perfectly correct, and one to which

it is believed the reader would give unqualified assent, provided the same opportunities for arriving at an opinion were available—the young mother bending over her baby son formed a very charming composition indeed, in every way Raphaelesque and beautiful. Wilford, the St. Joseph of the group according to the picture-dealer, is still pale and gaunt-looking, but his dejected manner has gone; the grey has made no further advance in his locks and beard; his eyes are brighter; he may be said, altogether, to look younger than when, two years back, he was recovering slowly from his nervous illness. He is alert, active, industrious; for his life has now colour, and object, and worth. He is a hard-working man of letters, who has achieved respectable literary fame; he toils earnestly for the

support of his wife and child; for he has been true to his old resolutions. He has declined all aid from his brother, or to receive any share in the Hadfield property. He has permitted to be carried out in their strict integrity the terms of his father's will. Still the brothers are good friends, and correspond occasionally. But the letter-writing is conducted as a rule with greater punctuality by the ladies of the two families. To Violet, Gertrude addresses very long narratives concerning her children, the doings at the Grange, and the latest Grilling Abbots news; while Violet returns equally interesting despatches, written closely on several sheets of note-paper—and the writing crossed as only women cross writing—containing full particulars of her little boy, especially in regard to the colour of his

eyes and hair, with certain disquisitions as to teething and gums, and other infant distresses; and information also as to Wilford's health and doings, and literary progress. Stephen has been once or twice in town, when he has visited his brother and sister-in-law residing on Mr. Phillimore's first floor, and been cordially received. Wilford, in spite of much fervid invitation and solicitation, has steadily refused to revisit the Grange—at all events, for the present, for so he has qualified his refusals, whether with any idea of availing himself of that qualification must remain a secret known only to himself. So it may be noted that Violet and Gertrude have, between themselves, two or three little grievances upon which they occasionally harp, and comment, and interchange opinions in their correspondence. Among these sub-

jects of regret and complaint should be stated Wilford's steady renunciation of the name of Hadfield (his first book—a collection of essays, very fairly successful—was published under the name of George Wilford, by which, indeed, he is generally known to the world); and further in his declining to return for ever so little to Grilling Abbots, in his hesitation to be acknowledged as the uncle of his brother's children, and, worse than all, in the slight offered to Gertrude's last baby by his refusal to stand as sponsor, or to give his name to the child. (N.B.—This is the second baby since the one referred to in Violet's letter, set out in a former chapter, and about which a similar cause of offence had arisen. Gertrude had been persistent in her endeavours to draw her brother-in-law as closely as pos-

sible to the family at the Grange; it says much for her and her efforts in this respect, that she had even forgiven these uncomplimentary proceedings in regard to her offspring.)

George Martin, of Plowden Buildings, frequently visited Mr. Phillimore's first-floor lodgers. In the first place, he had been known as an old friend of Wilford's in days gone by; he was now his literary ally; they had been *collaborateurs* on various employments, they had many sympathies, entertained many opinions in common, and were greatly attached to each other. But their pursuits were rather approximate than identical. Martin's literary achievements were mostly of a critical nature—he was allied as a reviewer to more than one journal of importance. Wilford had of late ventured more into the realms of imaginative lite-

rature; he began to be recognized as a writer of fiction, and he had a novel of full length on the eve of publication.

Violet had at once perceived that Martin was in every way worthy of being her husband's friend, and always welcomed him with pleasure to their home. George Martin not slowly won the appreciation of Mrs. Wilford. His regard for her husband would have been almost sufficient recommendation, but it must be added to this that Martin was, in the language of the picture-dealer, "a very fine specimen of Sir Thomas Lawrence"—that is to say, a man of refined and agreeable mien, handsome, intellectual, and with singularly attractive manners. And this—to Mr. Phillimore's amazement—notwithstanding that he gained his living by literary occupation.

George Martin was, therefore, often a guest at the table of the Wilfords. No very special arrangements were made on his account. The dinner was always sufficient, yet simple. He was not converted into an excuse for unusual stateliness or pretentious discomfort. He was paid the compliment of being supposed willing to be contented with the ordinary habits of the family. Violet was too good a housewife ever to provide ill-conditioned meals. Dinner parties were not given by the Wilfords; nevertheless, George Martin was always sure of good cheer and a pleasant evening, when invited to the first-floor in Freer Street. The dining together of three people who are intimate friends is really a very pleasant thing.

The Rembrandt rendered inefficient service at the dinner-table—but three

diners can generally manage with very little attendance. The cloth removed, a bottle was produced, which, if it did not reach the choiceness of quality of Mr. Phillimore's port (in pints), was, nevertheless, pronounced, by all interested, to be of a highly creditable vintage.

George Martin took great pleasure in these little dinners in Freer Street. A hard-working Temple bachelor, he seldom "went into society," as the phrase is. He could not often devote time sufficient to such a proceeding; and gradually he had confined himself more and more to the retirement of his rooms, content to lead a life, quiet, if sombre, which permitted to him the full enjoyment of his literary tastes, and did not call upon him to sacrifice his leisure to the requirements of inconvenient eti-

quette. For society is exacting. You are required incessantly to render homage and swear fealty, and acknowledge your vassalage; or you are accounted contumacious and unworthy, and your privileges are denied to you. Your time, and your smiles, and your best *mots*; your white neckcloth, varnished boots, and gloves of exquisite fabric, must always be ready, producible at the very shortest notice; hesitate, and, like a martinet officer, society pounces upon you, and dismisses you from her ranks. It was not from the churlishness which often chains men to dull dismal lives in obscure dwellings and by-paths of the world, that George Martin shrunk from social intercourse with his contemporaries. He was in every way fitted to shine where culture, and cleverness, and polished

manners were esteemed. And he would probably have liked to have earned distinction in this way; but somehow he had turned his life into different channels. Indolence and industry had combined to effect this. He could not sufficiently apply himself to the wooing of society's smiles and caresses; he followed with too great an avidity contrary pursuits. But in the company of his friends in Freer Street, he found consideration for his tastes in both directions. There was an elegance, and refinement, and repose about Violet which it would have been hard anywhere to match. He felt that to earn her regard would be a fair exercise of all his powers of pleasing; while her husband was his valued fellow-workman, whose presence was a warrant for his adherence to professional objects.

"Don't you think, Mr. Martin, that Wilford is looking very much too pale and thin?" Violet asked.

"This is Violet's constant crotchet, you must know, Martin. I believe we are all said to be slightly insane on certain topics. This is Violet's weak point—my state of health; my paleness and thinness. I really ought to be a skeleton by this time, considering the shocking way in which I've been going on, or going off, I should rather say, during the last two years, according to Vi's account."

"Yes, you always try to laugh off the question," said Violet; "but I shall still ask Mr. Martin to give me his opinion."

"Well, say, Martin; do I look very pale and thin?" asked Wilford.

"Yes, I think you do. I've been

thinking so for some time past," answered his friend.

"I was sure Mr. Martin would agree with me," exclaimed Violet.

"Yes, Vi, but it's only to agree with you that he says so."

"No; my opinion is perfectly unprejudiced. You ought really to take a holiday. I am sure you have earned one; you have been working very hard indeed of late."

"No holiday for me, just at present. I must see my book safely through the press, first; then we can, perhaps, begin to think about holiday-making. Do you know, Martin, it's rather cruel, and tiring, and desponding work, correcting one's proofs. They come dropping in, day after day, a sheet at a time. One gets to have at last such a minced notion of one's book;

at least so I find it. I grow so giddy over the fragments, I can't put them together at all at last, and fail to have any idea as to what the thing is really like and worth as a whole."

"I see you've been torturing yourself dreadfully. You really ought to have a change ; or you'll get much worse if you've taken to thinking in this way. Let me prescribe for you," said Martin. "Go to Paris for a week."

"Thank you, Mr Martin," said Violet, gaily, "that is precisely my advice. He needs change very much, and I am sure a week at Paris would be a great benefit to him."

"No, no," said her husband, rather seriously, "that would never do ; besides," he added, "I hate Paris."

"You hate Paris ! You heretic !" cried Martin, laughing. "But I forgot,

every one does not think as I do, though that is not a reason why I should be wrong. But I am not an imaginative writer, I don't deal in fiction—I criticize, I don't create; and it seems to me that there are only two places worth living in—London and Paris. I would divide my time equally between them if I could; but I am obliged to remain in London the greater part of the year; when I do get a holiday I go to Paris; the holiday over, I return to London.”

“You do not care, then, for the country, nor the seaside?” Violet asked.

“I prefer people to places; I would sooner have crowds of faces round me than be alone in the midst of magnificent scenery. A mountain is very superb, but can one look at it honestly for more than five minutes? Is it not exhausted and done with at the end of

that time, especially if one is neither a poet nor a painter? And the sea is very grand, and I enjoy it immensely for a quarter of an hour; I watch it bend down, and turn summersaults, and tumble into foam; I watch the repetition of this feat again and again, till at last I think I know all about it; I begin to yawn a little, I grow decidedly weary; I think I know all the sea can do; disrespectfully I throw a stone into it, and turn from the beach to see about the Paris or the London trains. A dreadful confession, is it not, Mrs. Wilford?"

"Yes; and I can only half believe it. But the country—do you not find it a great relief after hard work in town?"

"It's too great a relief. The violent change upsets me. The absence of noise, for instance; the awful quiet of the country makes me feel, somehow, not

that there is no noise, but that I am suddenly deaf and can't hear it—not a comfortable sensation. And country fare is too good for me, it makes me ill—I miss my metropolitan adulterations—and then I so miss the crowd; I want the streets and shops and houses, the swarms of men and women.”

“But the scenery?”

“Very wonderful and charming, but it never keeps my attention long. I have nothing in common with it, so it seems to me. There is a want of human interest in it. Do you care for reading poetry that is all landscape and colour, flowers and water and sky, and hasn't one fellow-creature breathing through it? I confess it tires me dreadfully. I am frightfully practical. I have lived so long in towns that I have lost my taste per-

haps for the country, just as captives become so accustomed to their prisons that they quit them with regret. And there is no real solitude and retirement in the country; where there are so very few people every one becomes as it were the public property of the rest. For real isolation and quiet, London, after all, is the only place."

"And especially a top room in the Temple, London."

"Yes. One is there snug and uncared for—alone and private—and yet only a few steps to reach a struggling crowd, all new faces which one will never see again. There is a fine field for contemplation! There is variety! It is more comfortable to be one of a million than one of a dozen. And I don't like country people over much; they are friendly but bumptious, kind but conceited, and they

hold Little Peddlington to be the garden of the world!"

"I am quite shocked at your opinions," said Violet; "and the way in which you talk of the country and of country people I account as a personal affront. I only wish Madge could have heard you."

"I shouldn't have dared to speak so openly had your sister been present."

"Madge would have gone exploding about the room like a firework," said Wilford, laughing.

"And you call this assisting me, Mr. Martin, to persuade Wilford to go out of town! Thanks for your aid! You are a most dangerous ally—you overpower those you profess to help. I shall leave you now to persuade Wilford by yourself. Perhaps you want to enjoy exclusively the credit of bringing him round to my opinion. I must go,

for I think I hear baby calling."

Violet quitted the room. The two friends drew their chairs more nearly together.

"Jesting apart," said Martin, I agree with Mrs. Wilford. You are really not looking very well, and a little change would do you a great deal of good."

"You are right," said Wilford, after a slight pause. "I am not well, but I would not confess so much to Violet; it would only occasion her uneasiness and alarm. Let me push forward with my book, for that must be attended to now, and I'll take a holiday—a good one—and recruit thoroughly. Yet I hardly know why I should be ill?"

"You have worked very hard of late. Does your head pain you?"

“At times. But my sleep is very broken, and I dream terribly when I do sleep. I am nervous somehow. Small things distract me—the sudden opening of a door, a slight noise in the street, anything happening unexpectedly, sets my heart beating quite painfully. I tease myself with all sorts of anxieties about my book and career. I have all sorts of presentiments about Violet and my child. I look forward to the future with a sort of dread of I know not what. Even while I speak of these things I am seized with a nervous trembling I am totally unable to control. Have you ever felt like this?”

“Once or twice. Something like it.”

“And what have you done?”

“I have brought myself to believe thoroughly in the realities of life. I have gone by the express to Paris and dined sumptuously at the Trois Frères. I have left off work and enjoyed myself, and I have found my nervous system recover rapidly under such a course of treatment. Try it in your case.”

“I think that mine requires rather more serious remedies. But something I must do shortly, for the thing grows upon me. I seem to have a difficulty at least in severing what is fact from what is mere matter of fancy and foreboding.”

He stopped for a few minutes, and then asked in an agitated tone:

“Did you ever feel as though you were followed in the street—continually followed, go where you would, by some

one whom you did not know, and could not see? Tell me, Martin?"

"Never. But do you imagine that you have been so followed?"

"It seems to me so: and I am not sure that it is simply imagination."

"You think you have been *really* followed?"

"Sometimes I feel quite certain of it."

"But the fact can easily be ascertained."

"Not so easily. Go where I will, I hear footsteps behind me; turn when I will to discover who follows me, I can see no one. May one not grow nervous in such a case?"

"Bah! Wilford, the nervousness occasions this fancy—is not occasioned by it. I have heard of some literary men being frequently followed," said Martin, laughing, "but it was

for debt. That is not your case, I know. Besides, the sheriff's-officer is not a phantom, he can be seen and felt, on the shoulder especially."

"Hush! not a word more of this—here's Violet."

A cup of tea, one or two of Violet's favourite songs — Wilford's favourites, too—from the Mozart book—the voice of the singer has lost nothing of its old exquisite beauty and music,—and George Martin, delighted with the melody, and though it is yet early, rises to depart.

"Indeed I must go," he says, pressing the hand of Mr. Wilford, "I have an hour or two's work to-night that may not be postponed. What am I to say to the printer when he comes to-morrow for copy, if I stay longer now? Good night."

“One moment, Martin. I’ll walk a part of your way. I’ve hardly been out all day.”

They were in the hall putting on their hats.

“A letter, sir,” cried the Rembrandt from the kitchen-stairs.

“You’re so abrupt, Sally, you quite frighten one,” said Wilford.

“It’s a bill, Wilford; the precursor of the bailiff,” and Martin laughed.

“It was left by a boy, sir, just this moment,” Sally stated.

A gentleman in the front parlour overheard this conversation. It seemed that he had not gone half-price to the play.

“A boy!” said Mr. Phillimore to himself, “yes a very bad specimen—not at all a nice head. I saw him. There are faces like his in some of Hogarth’s works; especially in the

Idle Apprentice and the Progress of Cruelty."

"Take care of the letter till I come back, Sally; or, stay—you may be gone to bed—I'll put it in my pocket."

And the two friends went out. They passed down Freer Street on their way towards the Temple. They had failed to perceive that a boy, of small stature, leaning against a lamp-post on the opposite side of the way, had watched their departure from Mr. Phillimore's, and was now stealthily following them, though at some distance. A boy thin and active, with long, thick, dark, straight hair, cut sharply and forming a sort of rectangular block at the back of his head. His cap was of the kepi pattern in use at certain French schools; but there were no pretensions of a

military or at least a uniform character about the rest of his dress, which was ordinary enough. He had a yellow-complexioned brazen face, with a cunning expression, and small restless green eyes. For some streets the boy succeeded in following Wilford and George Martin. Suddenly his progress was arrested—a large hand pressed heavily upon his shoulder. He started, but recollected himself, stooped down, twisted himself, and would have escaped but that the hand moved to his collar, and held him with a firm grip it was hopeless to struggle against.

“Stop then, *cher enfant!*” said a calm but rather grating voice.

“You let me go! You let me go! You hurt me! What have I done?” whined the boy in English, but with a strong French accent.

"You follow gentlemen in the street, is it not so, my little fox? I have seen you. You know me?"

"No, I don't know you—I don't know you! Let me go! You let me go!"

"Be quiet, will you," said the voice, and the hand released the boy's collar and grasped his over-large ear. "*Silence, petit tapageur.* You know me?"

"No," answered the boy, sulkily.

"*Regardez donc*"—and the boy felt his ear pulled round so that he was compelled to look into the face of a tall man in a glossy hat, with a dainty white neckerchief and gold spectacles. He had jet-black eyebrows, and short scraps of black whiskers on his cheeks. He was otherwise scrupulously shaven. His appearance gave one rather the idea of a foreigner trying to look like an Englishman

"You know me now—is it not so ?

"I have seen you before."

"I think so. Ah! little thief, would you dare? "

The boy had stealthily drawn a small knife from his pocket and unclasped it. The action was perceived at once—an iron grip round his wrist, perhaps, too, the painful pressure of a hard knuckle upon the back of his hand, made him open his fingers, and drop the knife with a gasp of pain.

"Take care what you do," and his ear was pulled sharply. "I have had my eye upon you for some days—upon you and your estimable family, and the excellent Mère Pichot. You will go straight home, if you please, little one. We will have no more following of English gentlemen in the streets. You will present to Madame

Pichot the assurance of my high consideration. Make to her my compliments. Do you understand, my charming boy? and let her know that I am on a visit to London."

"What shall I tell her? What name am I to say?"

The gentleman laughed heartily at this.

"Tell her that *Monsieur Chose* is staying in town. I think she will know who is meant."

He changed his tone to one almost of fierceness.

"And let her take care—let her take care; I am not a fool. I will not permit everything. The law has been kind to her as yet, but the times may change; and you, little one, take you care, worthy child of Père Dominique. Do you wish to follow the steps of your admirable and amiable father?"

He is well; but he is not happy. He complains of confinement, and that he cannot see his friends: and he will not see them—not for twenty years. Where do you live?”

“Over the bridge Waterloo,” answered the boy, instantly.

“Little liar! You are too quick. You are promising; if it was not that you are really much older than you look.—I know where you live—I know where to find you. Go, then, and above all take care. You are no match for Monsieur Chose—remember that—nor is Mère Pichot, neither. Good night, Monsieur Alexis.”

He released the boy's ear. The boy stooped as though to avoid a parting blow; but Monsieur Chose had, it seems, no further offensive intentions in regard to him. The boy recovered his

knife and darted off quickly ; but in a different direction to that taken by Wilford and his friend.

“Little devil!” said Monsieur Chose, dusting his strong white fingers as though to dismiss an unpleasant subject. He then lighted a cigar, drew his coat closely round him, took off his hat to bid a courteous good-night to a passing policeman, and went his way with an elastic step, humming a favourite air from the opera of *La Dame Blanche*.

## CHAPTER II.

## NIGHT.

QUITE unconscious of the scene of which they had been the occasion, the two friends walked on.

When men's conversation touches upon the subjects in which they are most interested, such as their career in life, their professional pursuits, their daily avocations, the world, I believe, which has rather a contempt for things simply natural and of course, designates the

proceeding "talking shop," and recommends us to avoid such discussion, by all means. For the world, while it does not approve of idleness, is still not indisposed oftentimes to regard us all as gentlemen at large, whose only ostensible objects in life are to visit our clubs daily, dress decently, pick our teeth and read the papers punctually, and then, after a certain number of years, to die and get buried as quietly and respectably as possible in, of course, a Protestant graveyard. We have no right, therefore, by our converse to reveal continually the circumstance or obtrude the fact that in truth we work for our bread, and are considerably interested in getting it. *That* is assumed at starting—we are English—we are industrious somehow; the particulars are not required; the fact once

admitted is not to be further alluded to, or we shall be guilty of the impropriety of "talking shop." Certainly society's sentiments in this respect are a little set at defiance. For whenever you perceive a knot of men engaged in particularly pleasant discourse you may be sure they are "talking shop;" and enjoying their evasion and contravention of duty, just as people take pleasure in the flavour of contraband cigars or the scent of smuggled *Eau de Cologne*; and indeed, waiving its impropriety socially considered, "talking shop" is really an amusing if not an edifying occupation.

Wilford and Martin talked shop greatly as they marched Temple-wards. They spoke copiously of *this* paper of Wilford's, of *that* review of Martin's, of Such-a-one's last, of So-and-so's next book, of plans for the future, of sug-

gestions for work, of their positions—the one as a novelist, the other as a critic. Undoubtedly the conversation was very shoppy; yet it interested them amazingly. They were quite busy with it when they arrived at the Temple.”

“Don’t hurry off,” said Martin, seizing Wilford’s arm; “it’s not late. Come in for half an hour. I’ve a lot more to say. Come in, and smoke a cigar. I shan’t go to work immediately; you won’t be the least in my way. You can correct some proof for me if you like, while I see if there are any messages or letters. Come along; indeed it’s not late.”

So they mounted many stairs, and reached at last George Martin’s chambers. These were not large, but were comfortable, and well, even handsomely furnished. One or two pictures of very

creditable execution adorned walls that were in other respects nearly hidden by bookshelves. Anybody who entered the rooms, expecting to find the litter, and untidiness, and discomfort which are universally attributed to bachelors, would have been disappointed. With the exception of the writing-table in the corner, which was certainly rather in confusion, crowded with open books, and scattered sheets of paper, and which looked rather as though it had been out without an umbrella in a shower of quill pens—the room was in good order. The furniture was good and massive, and the fittings in excellent taste. “My laundress is a treasure,” George would sometimes say, “with a bump of order strongly developed, and a decided passion for cleanliness. She is indulged in that

particular, always with the proviso that my writing-table is to remain intact, and its papers undisturbed, no matter into what habits of *déshabille* they may appear to have fallen—untouched by brush or duster. It's a subject of great distress to Mrs. Cobb, I can assure you—quite a grievance—but I am peremptory on the subject. I am a peaceful man on most occasions, but I should make this a *casus belli*. My table touched, I should unmask my batteries, and favour Mrs. Cobb with a broadside which would, I think, rather startle her. She is aware of the fact, and, I am happy to say, conducts herself accordingly. I know where to find things while my papers are in confusion. Once put them to rights, and I am a lost man." It was a pleasant room by daylight, looking on to the river and the

gardens; and at all times—while not too much like an office on the one hand, or too nearly resembling a drawing-room on the other—asserted itself as the appropriate home of a hard-working gentleman of the Tempie.

“What were we talking about?” asked Martin, reverting to some conversation that had preceded their arrival at his chambers. “Oh, I remember, about myself and critics generally. Well, you know the old notion isn’t quite exploded. The public have a liking for well-worn ideas: they cling to them as to old clothes that fit beautifully, and it’s hard to part with, though they are in tatters. The popular notion of a critic—and I am bound to say that some authors still back the opinion heavily—the popular notion has it, that the critic is still a sort of Blunderbore creature, always

crying 'Fee! fo! fum!' and smelling the blood of an author. They prefer that picture to the thought of a gentleman of respectable intelligence sitting down calmly to read the book through, and then writing deliberately his opinion upon it, impartially arrived at. I allow that there's less colour and force about *that* view, but I submit there's more truth: or do you prefer to hold that the reviewer cuts the leaves, smells the paper-knife as Hood suggested, sells the book to buy a pint of brandy, and then proceeds to abuse the author with all the savageness possible—and not the author only, but his father and his mother, and his sister and his brother? No; those tomahawking times are over, and I don't think critics nowadays are any fonder of brandy than church-wardens. By the way, let us have a

little while we're on the subject. Hot or cold? It won't hurt you—only half a glass? Not any? Pick out a good cigar from that bundle—smoke at least. No, a critic isn't always what people think him. They must give up the idea that he is a literary Malay intoxicated with intellectual bhang, running a muck among the books, and cutting and slashing at every author in his path."

"All this is to prepare my mind for your 'letting down' my book when it comes to you for review," said Wilford, laughing.

"No, indeed," answered Martin, "there was no such stuff in my thoughts. Besides, your book won't be let down. I look upon it as quite safe—safe, I mean, for a certain measure of success. Beyond that, accident must determine—the state

of the public mind—the other new books in the market—the temper of the time. It's not very difficult to beat the ruck; getting a good place in the race is another thing. But don't be depressed. I believe in the book. I'm sure it will do. I know it's honestly done; and about the ability there's no question. What does this note say? An invitation to dine with the Magazine people. I must go, I suppose—though dinners interfere with the morrow's work. Dear me! here's a load of proof. But I must begin with a cigar."

He lighted one.

"Stop," cried Wilford, "don't throw away the light." But he had not spoken in time; Martin had flung the lighted spill into the grate.

"I beg your pardon," said Martin, but we'll soon find a scrap of paper.

Not that though—that's MS., and this? By Jove, no, that will *not* do. A cheque."

"Thank you. I have a light now." He had drawn some papers from his pocket.

"The envelope of this letter will do." He twisted it up and set fire to it.

"By-the-by, what *is* this letter?" he said. He opened it. It was the letter he had put into his pocket on leaving Freer Street. He gave a glance at the rather unsteady writing—the pale ink—a few brief lines only. He had hardly had time to complete his perusal, when a violent trembling seized him, and his cigar fell from his lips.

Martin was turned away, searching among his papers.

"I wanted to show you a note I had from the publisher of the — Oh,

here it is! But, good heavens! what's the matter? You're as white as a sheet, man! What is it? Are you ill? What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Nothing," Wilford answered, with evident effort. His shaking hands crumpled up the letter, and thrust it into his breast-pocket.

"But there *is* something," Martin persisted. "A man doesn't look like that for nothing."

"No. No. A sudden faintness—that's all."

"Was there bad news in that letter?"

"No, it is not the letter. Indeed it is not—anything but that. The letter is only—only a bill. Nothing more than a bill—quite a trifle. I'm not well—not very well, as I told you."

"I fear not. Are you in pain?"

What shall I give you—some brandy? Try some brandy.”

“A little—a very little. Thank you, I feel better already. I’m sorry, Martin, to have to trouble you like this.”

“Trouble, my dear fellow! You mustn’t think of that.”

“Where did I put my hat? I’ll go now, while I am well.”

“No. You must not go yet. Wait till you recover more. Shall I send for a doctor?”

“Not on my account. I do assure you I am better now.”

“I never saw you like this before. Indeed, Wil, you must take care of yourself, or you may be in for another serious illness, such as you had some years back. I really think you had better not go—not yet, at any rate. The best thing you can do, would be

to go to bed here at once. I could easily send word to Mrs. Wilford, to let her know what had happened."

"No; not on any account; it would alarm her too much."

"Perhaps you are right; but rest a little longer, at any rate; I'll see you safe home."

"No, Martin, it will not be necessary. You see I am quite well again now, and the fresh air will be the best thing for me. I can't think of taking you out. Indeed I cannot."

"You'll get a cab. Promise me that."

"Yes, I will. I promise."

"I shall come round to-morrow morning, to see how you are——"

"Not unless I don't appear here before twelve o'clock, as I fully intend to. Good night."

“Good night. Take care of yourself. Do take care of yourself. Have some more brandy? No? Well, good night, my dear Wilford. Good night.”

“Good-bye until to-morrow morning.”

He had in a great measure recovered himself. Still he breathed very quickly, was much excited, and as he passed down the stairs he placed his hand on his forehead—to find his hair quite wet. He went out through the wicket at the top of Temple Lane, and hurried towards the Strand. He did not take a cab as he had promised he would, but he set off walking at a rapid pace which at times nearly quickened into a run.

“That man’s in a queer state of health,” said Martin, alone in his chambers: “he’ll have to take care what he’s about. He’s nervous, excit-

able, anxious: he's been poring over his papers until, turning his eyes from them, he finds himself quite giddy, and purblind, and confused. I know what it is to suffer like that; and I know, too, many men who, suffering like that, have succumbed, and for ever. It's very dreadful, that oppression on the brain—on the heart—that struggle with the mind, as it were,—that inability to direct our thoughts upon other than the work in hand; the waning of memory, and the terrible consciousness that it is waning; the loss of the names of men and things of the commonest nature; the awful tangle of ideas that seems to be seething in one's head; the broken sleep—the ghastly dreams at night; the painful exhaustion by day; the extreme sensitiveness of the nerves

when the slightest shock seems to result in agony the most acute. I have felt all that once—I fervently trust I never may again. It is the student's malady. Poor friend Wilford! Who would have thought of his suffering so! What changes time brings! He is a different creature to what he was years ago when we were boys—school-fellows—together. How long ago! A long, long time it seems now. Well, well, let's hope for the best. He'll go home and take a holiday, and return quite well. His wife will nurse him. Surely she will cure him. A wife like that——”

George Martin stopped suddenly with a strange expression on his face. It was as though he did not wish to be unexpectedly launched into meditation upon such a subject. Then he seemed

to smile faintly at his own hesitation. After a slight pause, he continued.

“Violet!” he said gently, with an air that was almost devotional. “Is there another woman in the world so wholly good, and pure, and true as she is? How beautiful, how tender, how lovable! If it had ever been my fate to have met such a one, how differently would my life have been ordered! What other hopes, views, ambitions, I should have formed! But that’s all past thinking about. And if I had met her, would she have heard my prayer—would she have even looked down upon me, giving glances as good as alms to a beggar, or healing to the sick? Would she not have passed on, never heeding, never dreaming of the love of one so every way unworthy of her? But this is miserable folly. I am fixed in my

*pose* in life. I can no more move than a beetle in a museum pinned to his cork. I am stranded on the rocks, out of the reach of the water, it may be, yet past all chance of any ship coming to pick me off. I must live in the best way I can, tilling the profitless flinty soil, hardworking for every mouthful, a Crusoe in the midst of civilization, wrecked in a Temple garret. Well, well, why should I repine? And I never have repined until I met *her*, and I felt my heart yearning towards her as I never felt before. Is love the absurdity, the nonsense, the idiocy that men declare it to be? Can that be despicable which arouses all the self-sacrificing and generosity of which nature is capable? It seems to me that love takes men back to all the poetry and chivalry of the grand past.

I would give my life to that woman, and I love her with all my soul! Yet, Heaven knows," he went on, the colour glowing in his face, "that there is no shame in my love! No wrong for her, for Wilford, for myself. I love; but it is my heart's secret—it will never be known to living soul. It may be madness, but it is not sin. I would not harm my friend even in thought, much less in deed. I love hopelessly—it is my own affair. I am resigned to that hopelessness. I am strong enough, I believe, to bear even that burden. And now—to work. My cigar is smoked out. Enough of this sentimentalism of a bald-headed, middle-aged man up three pair of stairs. For poor Wilford, he will recover, thanks to her care. Even if he sinks, she will be at his side to the last" (his voice softened and

trembled) "to close his eyes, to pray for him, to weep for him, as only a loving wife can. Good Heaven! what has he ever done to deserve such happiness!"

He trimmed his lamp and turned to his work. And at the time he did so, Wilford, with a look of agony in his face, was moaning forth the plaint—

"O God, what have I done that I should be so wretched!"

He was on Waterloo Bridge, leaning on the balustrade. A feeling of faintness had again come over him. He had torn open his neckerchief and shirt collar; it seemed to him that they hindered his breathing.

"Let me go out of the street—let me go where there is a chance of air." And he had quitted the Strand, and passed on to Waterloo Bridge.

He was panting for breath, his hand pressing on his heart, his white face turned towards the star-crowded heavens. For some moments he remained so.

"I thought the past dead," he murmured, in very troubled tones, "stone dead. I never dreamt it could rise up against me like this. And the future? What am I to do? God knows. I cannot—I dare not think! And Violet!"

He hid his face in his hands.

Some one approached—a tall man humming an operatic air. He passed Wilford, apparently not noticing him. He went on for some yards and then stopped—as people will do on bridges—to look down at the water or up at the sky, or round at the prospect. He was smoking a cigarette; he was evidently a man of varied accomplishments; he

smoked and hummed contemporaneously; he was well-dressed, in a black loose overcoat, a shiny hat, and a delicately white neckerchief. Black eyebrows formed almost parallel curves to his gold-rimmed spectacles, which glazed a pair of very sharp grey eyes. On his large white hand glistened a massive ring—a serpent with diamond eyes winding round and gnawing a blood-red carbuncle. He communed with himself.

“A fine night. It is pleasant here. One gets out of the frightful noise of those streets there. I like my evening promenade on the bridge. It is exclusive. What a difference a *sou* makes! It is well worth that to be alone and quiet. The Bridge Waterloo! But I am above little prejudices. Why should I not aid its funds with my *sou* each evening? The bridge which those drolls of English

built to celebrate the victory of Herr Blücher! Well, well, what is it to me? It was before my time, perhaps. What does the past ever signify?—nothing.”

And he sang in a pleasant barytone voice a fragment of a French *chanson*, while he rolled up adroitly and rapidly another cigarette.

“It is pleasant looking from this bridge. It is pretty—all those little rows of lights of the other bridges. It was here that poor M. Nourrit walked up and down thinking to kill himself, but he could not make up his mind. There are many would kill themselves if they could only make up their minds. Suicide would spread but for that little difficulty; and the want of a steady hand. Yes, *that* also,—it needs *that*. Poor dear M. Nourrit! How well he used to sing, ‘*Des chevaliers de ma*

*patrie.* Ah!" (and he turned his eyes upon Wilford) "we have company! Who is that person there? What! a suicide—or what you call a swell? Is not that it? Bah! what is it to me, suicide or swell? What care I! I am not of the police English. Let him be suicide if he will. Why should the police obstruct the suicides? What harm do they do? Ah, I forget. They have no Morgue in London! That is why! What savages — no Morgue! The sight the most agreeable of Paris—always new—always full of charm, and crowded, above all, with those drolls of English who have no Morgue in their dog of a country! Where, then, here do they make exposition of bodies? La! la! oup la! oup la! O la!" (And the gentleman resumed his singing.) "No, he will not suicide to-night. Bravo!

my friend, you have reason." (Wilford had turned from the parapet, and was now walking slowly towards the Middlesex end of the bridge.) "You are tall; you are strong. Why should you jump to the water? He has black beard. Ah! I am not of the English police. But, let me see, then, the face of the suicide—of the swell. Which is it? Behold! this is interesting. I will follow him."

"I will write to her!" Wilford exclaimed. He quickened his pace—he left the bridge. Not far from it he perceived that a coffee-shop was still open. It was on the other side of the road. He crossed to it and entered. It was almost deserted.

"A cup of coffee," he said; "and bring me a sheet of paper, pen and ink."

"It grows late, sir," remarked the woman in the shop; "we were about to close."

"I will detain you only a very few minutes."

Another guest had entered the room. The woman bestirred herself to bring what was required. Wilford did not drink his coffee, but he commenced writing.

"*My dearest Violet,*" he wrote. Then he paused. Subsequently he made two or three attempts to proceed with the letter. But he could not satisfy himself. He leant his head upon his hands, lost in doubt for some moments. Then suddenly he roused himself.

"No," he muttered, "I cannot write to her—I cannot leave her like that. I must see her—speak to her, even though it should be for the last time." He tore the paper into strips.

He paid the small sum due for the coffee he had not tasted, and the paper he had torn, and quitted the shop.

The other guest changed his seat. He collected the scraps of paper Wilford had left,—some on the table, some scattered on the floor.

“A good rule,” he said, “never to lose a clue. And I am interested in spite of myself. So then; I recognize him; this is the *Monsieur* whom *le petit Pichot* was following. And why? He is not a pick-pocket” (he divided the words scrupulously). “This young Alexis? Who knows? And what share has la Mère Pichot in this matter? We shall see.” He went out into the street.

Not far from the shop a gentleman was getting into a cab.

“Freer Street, Soho,” he said to the cabman.

“Is it worth while to follow? Or have I made myself to know enough for the present?” Monsieur Chose asked himself, smiling blandly the while.

## CHAPTER III.

## A PARTING.

WILFORD HADFIELD re-entered the house in Freer Street. He had with him the key of the street door, so that he was able to return without noise. But he saw by the light in the first-floor windows that Violet had not yet retired for the night; she was probably sitting up expecting his coming back; and in the hall he encountered Sally, the Rembrandt.

“Lawks! it’s you, is it?” she cried out. She was never ceremonious in her greetings, nor, indeed, in her speech generally. “How you frighten one coming in so quiet, for all the world like a thief!”

“I thought you’d have been in bed by this time, Sally!” said Wilford, apologetically.

“Lawks, no!” Sally retorted. “It’s little I care about going to bed. It seems to me it’s hardly worth while going to bed at all; life ain’t long enough for such waste of time; and all the trouble of putting one’s things off and on, and washing, and that; I think one could get on just as well without it all.”

Certainly the Rembrandt seemed to be inclined to carry out her own views in this respect as fully as possible. She

was always very late retiring for the night, and was fond of entering upon lengthy occupations at most unseasonable hours. She had been known, more than once, to be busy washing the door-steps, or cleaning the windows at midnight; while the sounds of boot and knife polishing had frequently been heard at one o'clock in the morning; she was certainly the earliest riser in the house, and to be found groping about on pitch-dark winter mornings, wakeful and active, when the other residents at Mr. Phillimore's were probably in the enjoyment of their first sleep. A strange, ugly, not clean-looking, rude-mannered, hard-working, kindly old woman, very valuable to Mr. Phillimore's household, and that quite apart from her pictorial qualifications. Was she conscious of these? Anyhow, she

was always putting herself into advantageous positions—considering her as a work in the Rembrandt manner—“fetching out her *chiar’ oscuro* effects,” as Mr. Phillimore termed it. A most picturesque bundle, eminently Flemish in style, she was fond, it seemed, of crouching over her kitchen fire—the red light gleaming on her shrivelled, corrugated face in a wonderful way; and she was prone to hold a swaling, flaring candle high above her head as she moved about the house, her eyes thrown by such means into dense warm brown fog, while her knotted projecting nose cast down a deep shadow that nearly hid her lips. Contemplating her gnarled visage under these aspects, the picture-dealer grew quite warm with satisfaction at his possession of such a treasure, and could only, by the exercise

of the most extraordinary self-restraint, be stayed from doubling her wages on the spot, or insuring her life instantly, to an enormous amount.

“Lawks, how pale the man is!” cried Sally, her eye falling on Wilford’s white face. “Are you cold? Ain’t you well? Lawks me! I never saw nothing like it. What’s the matter?”

“Hush, Sally; there’s nothing the matter. Stay. Who left that letter you gave me as I went out a little while ago?”

The question was rather nervously asked.

“That letter? Why, I told you—a boy.”

“What sort of boy?”

“What sort of boy? Ain’t they all alike? Imperent warmints!—throwing

stones, and calling names, and dirting the door-steps, and flinging muck down the airies. I'd pay 'em out well, I would, if I was their mothers, which thank God I ain't, and never will be."

"Was he English?"

"Well, now you mention it, I don't know as he was. But, bless you! he was off afore you could wink a'most—shoves the letter into my hand bold as brass, and off goes my lord. No, I don't think he were English, from what I could see of him, which wasn't much. Leastways, there was a queer look about him, and he had a funny-shaped cap on. I shouldn't wonder now but what he was one of them furriners!"

Wilford mounted the stairs quickly, and entered the drawing-room.

He was much excited, but it was

evident that he was doing all that he possibly could to command himself. It seemed as though he had determined upon a certain line of conduct, and that with the determination strength had come to him to carry it out thoroughly. He had concentrated all his energies to play out the part he had prescribed to himself. Thus he managed to place a restraint upon his feelings, and to suppress a nervous agitation which, however natural, would have interfered with his plans.

“My dearest Violet,” he said, advancing to his wife. Some strangeness in his voice must have struck her: she started up.

“Has anything happened?”

“What *should* happen?” and he looked at her for a moment suspiciously.

"Your hand quite trembles, Wil," she said. "Are you well? Is anything wrong with you?"

He released his hand from her grasp, with an effort at a laugh that was not very successful.

"Listen, wife mine," he said, still with a feeble attempt at mirth. "Sit down quietly, and I'll tell you all."

She obeyed him at once, with assumed calmness, for there was something in his manner that alarmed her—she knew not why.

"How curiously things fall out sometimes," he said. "Do you remember what you were saying at dinner-time, when Martin was here, that you wished me to desist from work for a little—to leave London—to take a holiday?"

"Yes, I remember that," she said, faintly, a sense of fear coming over her.

“Well, the opportunity has arrived, strangely enough, this very night.” He turned away his eyes, and spoke very quickly. “I went back with Martin to his chambers. He found there a letter from—a man whose name you would not know if I were to mention it to you, but who is of some fame in the literary world, and is indeed commonly regarded as the representative of an important daily newspaper. Well, it seems a confidential person is required in the interests of the newspaper to proceed forthwith to Paris, as correspondent there. The gentleman who has hitherto filled that office has been taken suddenly and alarmingly ill—the news has only just come to-night by the telegraph. Somebody must go at once, or they will be without their usual Paris letter—an extraordinary loss in

these times—must start at once to act on behalf of the paper for a few days, until their present correspondent recovers, or until some one is permanently appointed in his stead. Martin has been offered the post, but he has refused it; in fact, he is at present so tied to London by his engagements, that he could hardly be expected to accept it; but he has strongly urged me to go in his stead.”

“And you will?”

“Yes; after some hesitation I accepted the offer. The work will not be severe. The change will be of service to me, and the chance of establishing a connection with an influential newspaper like that, is one I ought not to slight. Has not all this happened fortunately?”

“And you are going—when, Wilford?”

"At once, dearest."

"I may go with you? Why do you shake your head? Why may I not?"

She was rather scared by the thought of this unexpected journey, and there were evidences almost of terror in her voice.

"No, Vi, it is not possible."

"But why not?"

"Dearest!" he said, rather troubled, "I should wish for nothing better than to be able to take you with me; but consider the haste of the thing, the discomfort, the uncertainty! I may not be gone more than three or four days. Why should you be subjected to all this inconvenience?"

"Wilford, you know I should not heed that—only let me be by your side. I am frightened by this hurry

and suddenness. I cannot bear that we should be parted thus. You are not well now. You are not strong enough for all this turmoil. Oh, why did you consent to go? How could you think of leaving me? Write, and say that upon reflection you cannot: tell them—anything! Only do not leave me, Wilford. You may fall ill on the road. You may die, Wilford, and I shall never see you more.”

The tears started to her eyes at the thought, and she circled him with her soft arms, and kissed him.

“Dearest Vi, is this reasonable?” he said, gently. “I have accepted the offer made to me. Am I not bound in honour——”

“Enough, Wilford. You must go, I see. But may I not go with you?”

“You forget, Vi, the baby. You cannot leave baby; and we cannot expose the little one to all the fatigues of this journey.”

“True,” she said, rather sorrowfully. “I was not thinking of what I said. Forgive me, husband dear; but at the mention of our first separation——”

Her voice failed her.

Fondly he drew her to his heart, and she hid her face and her tears on his breast.

“A few days only, Vi, and I shall come back again, well and strong—think of that!”

“It will not be more than that?”

“Oh, no! I only accept it on those conditions. I wouldn’t have the permanent appointment on any terms. But the opportunity of the change—of

obliging Martin—of making friends with an influential organ——”

“Yes, I see; you must go. What time to-morrow shall you start?”

“To-morrow?—I go to-night—at once. I have come home simply for a carpet-bag, and, what is more important, for a kiss from my wife and child before I start.”

“But there is no train to-night?”

“No, but there is an early one in the morning. The intervening hours I spend with the editor in the city—closely closeted—receiving my instructions.”

“Oh, Wil, this is dreadful!—I cannot let you go!”

“Come, Vi, dearest, take courage—the thing is not really dreadful. Pack a few things for me, there’s my dar-

ling wife. I shall be back with you again before you've had time to miss me."

She shook her head with a sad smile, as she quitted the room to fulfil his request.

He seemed to breathe more freely in her absence. But he was very restless: he strode about ceaselessly with shaking hands.

"God forgive me!" he said at length, deeply pained. "It is the first time I have lied to her. My own dear Violet!"

She came back presently. She had made all necessary preparations for his departure, but the tears were still in her eyes.

"I did not think myself so weak," she said. "Forgive me, Wilford! I ought to have more sense, ought I not, than to

be crying because you are leaving me for only a day or so? I don't know how it is—of course it's very foolish—but I have a sort of dread about this journey. Perhaps because the news of it came to me so suddenly. I have all sorts of foolish thoughts and doubts about it. I *do* wish you were not going. Still it's all simple and natural enough, is it not? Say that it is. And you'll write immediately on your arrival, and you'll come back very, very soon to me and baby, won't you, Wilford? I do wish it were all over, and you safe home again. Good-bye, dearest Wilford!"

"Good-bye, my own wife!" and he strained her to his heart. He was greatly troubled, and trembled very much; he was nearly giving way under the pain of that parting. "For

you *are* mine, are you not, Violet? And you will love me always, whatever happens? We are husband and wife, for better and for worse, and our love shall last through weal and woe, through good report and evil report. You will love me always, promise me that!"

"What are you saying?" she asked, softly, smiling through her tears.

"Nay, I hardly know. I have caught something of your doubts and forebodings, I think. It is our first parting, Violet, as you say. Perhaps that is the cause. Again, good-bye! Keep your heart up, there's my brave Violet! Love me and trust in me always. Good-bye."

One last hurried kiss, and he was gone. She heard the noise of the cab bearing him away; she

listened until the sound quite died off. Then a sense of loneliness came dreadfully upon her, and the tears streamed down her face. Had Mr. Phillimore seen her then he would have cried aloud in his admiration at the exquisite semblance of Raffaele's Mater Dolorosa that she represented.

"I have never doubted him," she said. "Let me not doubt him now. And yet there was something new and strange in his voice as he spoke of that newspaper business. And then this sudden departure. No! no!" and she interrupted herself passionately, "he is my own good true husband! I wrong him by a moment's doubt of him."

And Violet dried her eyes and passed upstairs, to kneel before the cradle in

the front room, to kiss tenderly the rosy little child curled up closely and fast asleep; to weep anew, and pray for her husband and the father of her child.

“If I were never to see her more!” murmured Wilford, as the cab bore him rapidly away. The thought seemed to be to him agony the most acute.

The cab did not go into the city—drew up at no newspaper office. It stopped at the door of an hotel near Covent Garden Market. The night-porter was roused, and the cab dismissed. Wilford was shown into a bedroom. He flung down his carpet-bag.

“At least I have now time to think; I have gained that much,” and he drew his hand nervously across his forehead. “Let me read this infernal letter again.” And he took it, a

crumpled ball of paper, from his pocket and smoothed it on the dressing-table in the room. As he did this he caught sight of himself in the glass. "Heaven!" he exclaimed, involuntarily, "How white I am!"

He rested his head upon his hands, and remained so for a long time, bent over the letter. It contained but a few short lines, yet he sat brooding over these, reading them again and again, as though he were learning them by heart. At last he seemed to be staring in a dazed, vacant way, as though his eyes really took no cognizance of the writing before him, and his thoughts were miles and miles away. With an effort he brought himself back to consciousness of surrounding circumstances. Once more he read the letter.

“I shall remember the name,” he said, at last, in a hollow voice, “and the address: ‘*Boisfleur*y—second floor—67, *Stowe Street, Strand*,’—I shall not forget that. For this—” He stood for a long time irresolutely, folding it up, winding it round his fingers, twisting it into all sorts of shapes. “Yes, it had better be burnt!”

He lighted it at the candle, thrust the flaming paper into the empty grate, and watched it slowly consume. He waited until the last spark had flown from it. A few flakes of tinder only remained of the letter which had disturbed him so strangely.

“So far so well,” he said; “what next?”

And he shuddered.

He looked round nervously at the gaunt-looking bedroom. It could hardly

be comfortable; it struck him as so new and unaccustomed, and the heavy furniture of the room quite absorbed and oppressed the light. The place seemed very dim and dreary, and full of dense shadows huddling closely in the corners. He had never felt so sad and desolate before.

Slowly he undressed and went to bed—hardly to sleep, however.

## CHAPTER IV.

## A MEETING.

STOWE STREET is one of those numerous parallel "no thoroughfares" which pierce the Strand crosswise, and, leading down to the banks of the river, arrive at a sudden termination of close iron railings. Passing along the Strand, glimpses of the Thames are every now and then to be caught by means of these streets, as through crannies in a wall. One might almost fancy

that a colossal panorama of the river had been cut into transverse slips, and pasted up here and there to break the monotonous line of houses. A slight woof of water and sky crossing pleasantly now and then an endless warp of bricks and mortar—a savoury morsel of an unwieldy and disproportioned sandwich—soothing to the eye, though the heaven may be lead-coloured, and the wavelets opaque, and the freight they float no better than shapeless barges with brown patched sails, carried up by the tide, or gross blunt-edged lighters “zedding” along, careless what they bump against, like strong drunken men; or lively little steamers that dart about like tadpoles, and make so much noise, and carry so many, and all for so small a charge.

London is more thoroughly partitioned into *quartiers* than is demonstrable by maps ; or than many people imagine. These purblind defiles, hemmed in between a silent and a particularly loud highway, may be said to be set apart for the open-air performances of barrel-organs, Punch and Judy, the street conjuror, the versatile monkey who plays the fiddle and goes through the musketry exercise with equal ability, the acrobats — and for the residence of many lodgers of semi-respectable and not expensive habits. The neighbourhood is thickly populated : it contains few shops, but several offices, in which vague professions are carried on. The tenants are generally inclined to be mysterious as to their occupation ; they all carry street-door keys, are partial to late sup-

pers of a shell-fish character, never clean their windows, and invariably evade the income-tax collector.

It was noon when Wilford knocked at the door of No. 67, Stowe Street. It seemed almost as though such a proceeding were quite out of rule. He was detained some time on the step; yet he could plainly hear the noise of persons moving about in the passage. Windows were thrown up and heads projected, and he was probably inspected by the residents in different parts of the house. The door was at length opened by a short, broad servant—"servant gal" perhaps conveys the most complete notion of her—warm, moist, and not clean-looking, always busy holding on to her rough head a whity-brown cap, which seemed to

be endowed with some volatile attribute, and was constantly flying behind or soaring above away from her; with muscular red chapped arms, and a dirty lilac print dress, the seams of which had parted in various places subjected to special tension, and (of course) black stockings, open at the heels, casing legs of substance and ankles of power rather than grace. She had always a scared wild way with her. She tacked and tumbled along a good deal, leaving in her progress the marks of black hands upon walls, and doors, and banisters; and, when asked questions, had a way of lowering her head menacingly, as though she were about to butt at or to toss her questioner. These qualities allowed for, she was a hard-working, industrious, good-natured, and useful domestic, very valuable to No. 67,

Stowe Street, and the dwellers therein. Her manner of fetching the beer from the public-house at the corner, it may particularly noted—(and she was frequently out on such a mission, for her employers had a habit of requiring refreshment at almost impossible hours, and, so to say, running the Acts of Parliament very fine indeed)—was one of the most gallant and intrepid, as it was unquestionably one of the most rapid feats on record.

“Was Madame Boisfleury at home?”

The servant stared at Wilford through the half-opened door, lowering her head with doubtful intentions. She seemed to regard the inquiry as an innovation for which she was totally unprepared, and a reply to it as decidedly out of her range of duties, and to conquer with difficulty a strong

impulse prompting her to slam-to the door and hurry from the scene. Finally, she admitted the visitor to the door-mat—leaving him there stranded, as it were, on a desert island, “to go and see.” She was sometime gone; meanwhile the visitor, quite unconsciously was the subject of considerable curiosity and contemplation on the part of several spectators resident in the house, who hung over the staircase in almost dangerous attitudes the better to view him. Finally the servant returned. Much talking and hurrying about, and banging of doors, had been heard in her absence. As in her ascent, so in her descent, she manifested an unchariness connected with the display of her hose, that, considering its want of repair, was decidedly remarkable.

“Madame was at home, on the second

floor—would he walk up?" He would—and he did. The servant thereupon left him to his own resources, and forthwith precipitated herself down the kitchen stairs with singular recklessness. But she laid stress on speed; and as she had found by experience that people often got down stairs more quickly by falling than by a more gradual and safer method, she elected as a rule the former procedure. It is true that to a bystander it looked a little like suicide; but if speed was gained, pray what did that matter?

The door of the front room on the second floor being open, Wilford entered there. He found himself alone. The room was so respectably furnished that one might have wondered, at a first glance, how it was the general effect was yet so shabby and comfortless.

But a very little will give an awry look. The failing here was general untidiness; crooked blinds, tumbled curtains, draggled table-cover, littered mantelpiece, unswept hearth, dull grate, powdered with white ashes, nothing "put away," and every chair occupied by some book, or paper, or parcel, or article of dress; and one over-riding notion as to how much better it would be if the windows could be left open for ever so short a time, and a little fresh air admitted into the place.

There was the rustling of a dress; a tall woman swept into the room.

Old and wrinkled evidently, in spite of her paint (white and red), her glossy false hair, kept in its place by a jewelled fillet, her pencilled eyebrows, her thousand-and-one toilette frauds upon Nature and Time. What

a strange sinister look there was in the eyes of this woman!—so restless, yet so weak and watery, glittering out of a tangle of wrinkles with the sort of ferret-red brilliance of sham-jewels. What hard ugly lines were carven round her features—not ill-formed, but ill-combined—resulting in an expression of treachery and cunning and cruelty! The mouth especially, hard and coarse, and the teeth—greatly revealed when she spoke—large and ill-shapen, and especially bad in hue, thanks, perhaps, to the contrast with the vivid artificial bloom in their neighbourhood. She was attired in greasy black satin, with a handsome India shawl huddled upon her shoulders, probably to conceal the fact that the dress had been hastily assumed, and had not indeed been effectually fastened at the back. She made a low curtsy to her

visitor as she closed the door after her, and advanced into the room. Her sly eyes passed rapidly over Wilford. She seemed to prolong her salutation for the express purpose of gaining time and thoroughly examining his looks and bearing, and satisfying herself thereupon. And she was evidently a little unnerved. Her hand shook as she stretched it forth; it was more decorated by jewellery than cleanliness; and her rings had a suspicious look about them. But this might be purely fancy. There are some hands upon which the best of gold appears like brass, and the purest diamond no better than paste.

“Oh! Mr. Hadfield, this *is* kind,” she said, in a hollow, drawling, carny-ing tone of voice.

Either he did not really see or he

purposely disregarded her outstretched hand. Certainly he did not take it, and she calmly withdrew it, but with no air of being offended. For some moments he was silent. He glanced at her, and then averted his eyes. He spoke at last in a low, constrained voice, with evident effort.

"Madame Pichot," he began.

"*Boisfleury*," she interrupted, holding up her hands with an imploring gesture, "will you oblige me so far? *Boisfleury*. There are reasons for the change. Not Pichot, thank you—*Boisfleury*. Will you bear that in mind?"

"The name matters little. *Boisfleury*, if you will. I have received your letter. You wished to see me. I am here."

"But why this tone?" she asked, affectedly, her head on one side, and

a dreadful smile upon her lips; "why so severe—so abrupt? This is not the Wilford Hadfield I remember years back. What a change! To think that we should meet like this!" She dabbed her eyes with a crumpled, soiled lace pocket-handkerchief.

"I think you forgot how we parted," he said, coldly.

"But are we not friends?"

"Friends!" he repeated, scornfully.

"You are not kind to one you have known so long. You don't appear glad to see me?" There was something sickening about her fawning, false manner.

"I am not glad to see you."

"You don't ask me how I am." She passed over his look of contempt for her, and added, "You

don't ask after Regine — no, nor Alexis. You don't know how useful he is to me. Perhaps I should not have seen you now but for Alexis."

"And your husband?" She trembled a little—the blood rushed to her face and heightened her rouge.

"Dominique is in Paris. He is not well; he is confined to his room; he is no longer so young as he has been. He is often ill now, and unable to go out, or he would be here now."

"And now, tell me—you have found me—I am here in consequence of your request—What is your wish?"

"We are not to be friends then? You seek to quarrel with me."

"What is it you want?" he said,

harshly. Her manner changed—it became more brusque and abrupt. They had been standing hitherto.

“Let us sit down,” she said. “Perhaps our conversation may be of some length. You desire to know why I sent to you?” He signified assent. “Well, it will not be hard to explain *that* to you—it would not be difficult for you, perhaps, to discover the reason without any explanation. Look around you—you see where we are living—you see the sort of neighbourhood—the position we occupy—our manner of life. Is it the sort of sphere in which *I* ought to move, or Regine, or Alexis?”

“I have known you in a humbler one,” he remarked. The words angered her. “You were

not always Madame Boisfleury nor even Pichot. You are English born—of obscure parents. Years ago when you were——”

“Enough!” she cried, almost fiercely. “Is it a fit position for Alexis—for Regine? Do you know what she is doing to earn a livelihood? Do you know to what an occupation she has been compelled to stoop?”

She tossed over a thin printed paper, which she took from the mantel-shelf. He glanced at the paper, then folded it, and put it into his pocket.

“I am glad it is even so honest as this,” he said, calmly; “for after all, this *may* be honest.”

His quiet manner, whether genuine or affected, ruffled the woman.

“If you will not gather my ob-

ject from what I have said already, if you will not guess it by the aid of your memory as to what has happened in the past, I will tell you my meaning in plain words." She struck the table smartly with her closed hand. "*I want money.*"

"I imagined as much."

"And I *will* have it."

"You will NOT. For a sufficient reason—I have none. Years ago I gave all I had. You may remember the conditions—my presence here, at your request, is a breach of them."

"You have been unmolested for a long while; application would not be made to you now, were it not inevitable. I am in debt. I am much in want of money. I am speaking only in my own name, but I might com-

promise others in my remarks—money must be had. To whom should I apply for it, if not to you?”

“You misunderstand my position. You are unacquainted with the plain facts of the case.”

“Pardon me, that is not so.”

“The situations of the Wilford Hadfield whom you knew years ago, and of the man who now stands before you, are widely different.”

“Pardon me, I say again. Perhaps I am better acquainted with the real facts of the case than you think. Your father is dead. He died nearly three years ago. I saw the notice in the newspapers. By his death——”

“By his death I was not—am not—one sou the richer.”

“I know it, Mr. Wilford; he bequeathed the whole of his property to

his younger son, and cast you off. Why,—*you* best know.”

“Then with these facts before you—though how you became acquainted with them I know not——”

“Bah !” she interrupted, rudely, “there need be no mystery in the matter on my part. Wills can be read at Doctors’ Commons for a shilling; and to make sure I travelled down to Grilling Abbots.”

“*You* did?” he cried, frowning.

“*I* did. Why should I not? Is not the place free to all the world? There are no passports in this country. What was to hinder my going there—with Alexis, my son—to stop at the George Inn, for a little holiday and change of air? Who was to recognize me? I was not there as Madame Pichot; nor Madame Boisfleury neither;

for that matter. Why should I not go to see all the show places in the neighbourhood—the castle at Mowle, the Druidical remains at Chingley, the Norman church at Grilling Abbots—yes, and the picture-gallery at the Grange? ”

What a hateful sneer was on her face as she ran through this list !

“ *You* went to the Grange? ”

“ Yes. Why not? Mr. Stephen Hadfield is liberal; he throws open his house for inspection two days in the week, the visitor producing his card, or procuring a ticket from Mr. Joyce of the George Inn. Why should I not go over the Grange? Though I knew every inch of it years ago—many years now. Well, the people talk in that neighbourhood just as much as they used to talk in the old time. The

servants talk at the Grange, the frequenters of the George talk, all Grilling Abbots talks. I soon learnt that you had been disinherited."

"Well, did not that satisfy you?"

But she did not heed the question.

"And I learnt that Mr. Stephen was master of the Grange, and I saw him about the place, with his wife and children—quite a family party. A nice, amiable-looking gentleman, and every one said that he was as good, and nice, and amiable as he looked; and that he was very sorry his brother had quitted the Grange; that he would have given him anything to remain, would give him anything now—no matter what; that there was no quarrel between the brothers; and that Mr. Wilford might still have half the estates, even, if he chose."

"They told you this?"

"Yes."

"Did they tell you, also, that I had refused these things a dozen times—that I had determined that the will should be carried out in its integrity—and that not one half-penny of my father's money should find its way into my pocket? Did they tell you that also?"

"They did."

"Well?"

"And I did not believe it."

"Why not?"

"Because I knew the time might arrive when you would be glad to dip your hand into your brother's purse willingly proffered. And I was right. The time has arrived now. If you have not the money we need, you will obtain it from Mr. Stephen Had-

field of the Grange, your younger brother."

"You are wrong."

He rose with a determined air, as though to end the interview. He took his hat.

"You are wrong, Madame Boisfleury. As I said at first, I have no money. I am a poor man; I work for my bread; I am quite unable to assist you, if I were even willing so to do, and I am not."

"This is hasty conduct, Mr. Wilford; you will think better of it."

"Undeceive yourself."

There was a slight pause. Then the woman resumed.

"I heard other tidings at Grilling Abbots—strange things they were, too, and very new to me—very new indeed. You were ill at one time, it seems;

so ill that you were quite given over; no one expected that you would ever recover. Meanwhile you were a visitor beneath the roof of the doctor at Grilling Abbots—Mr. Fuller, who resides in the pretty white cottage at the end of the town.”

She stopped, looking at him with a strange meaning in her red, restless eyes.

“Well?” Wilford said, rather faintly.

“You recovered, thanks to the care of the doctor and the nursing of his daughters.”

He trembled visibly, looking askance as she said this.

“You were very grateful for his and their zeal, were you not? It was necessary to do something in proof of your gratitude, was it not so?”

So perhaps, for that reason you made love to the eldest daughter—offered her your hand in marriage, made her your wife. *Was* that the reason ? ”

He made no answer ; he was breathing heavily, his hands shaking as with palsy, his face pale as death.

“ Violet Fuller,” the woman went on. “ I saw her name in the register of marriages in Grilling Abbots Church. I asked to see the book, and they showed it to me. I saw her signature—‘ Violet Fuller ’—and yours—‘ Wilford Hadfield ’—written boldly and plainly enough ; and her father and her sister—they too signed the book—the witnesses, I suppose. Oh, it was very complete ; and very interesting.”

She stopped again, glancing at him as though she expected him to speak.

But he made no attempt to do so; he kept his eyes steadily turned from her.

“Is not all this true?”

“It *is* true,” he answered in a low voice.

“Have you nothing to say about it?”

“Nothing,” he replied, with a gasp.

“Perhaps you thought this would never come to my ears: that the whole thing would be kept secret and hushed up. You did not manage very well. You should not have had the wedding at Grilling Abbots; *that* was a mistake—a decided oversight. I give you credit for the way you have hid yourself in London. Yet an assumed name is an easy matter, and London is a very large place.

I could not get your address at Grilling Abbots, nobody would tell me ; probably, nobody knew except the members of your own family, and I could not well ask them. But Alexis is very clever if he once gets a clue. Give him a scent, and he'll follow it like a bloodhound. I learnt that you had been publishing books—quite a celebrated author, I declare. I fancy Alexis found you out by tracking you from your publisher's to your lodgings in Freer Street. Is not that where you live ? He has been on your heels for days, following you like a dog. Oh, he is a faithful creature, a good boy, is Alexis."

Still Wilford said nothing ; he looked dazed and confused, like a man in a dream.

"I have not been to Freer Street myself; I have not yet called upon your wife."

"You will not go!" he cried, in a tone of acute suffering.

She paid no attention to him.

"Is she pretty, this wife of yours? this doctor's daughter? this Violet Fuller?—charming name, so romantic. And there's a baby, too, isn't there? a son and heir! Dear me! how interesting!"

"Woman," he said, "be silent. You will drive me mad!"

She abandoned the air of banter she had assumed, and said in coarse, blunt tones:

"You will give me this money, then?"

"How much do you want?" he asked, feebly.

“A mere trifle—and when it is paid——”

“You will demand a further and a further sum; what security can I have that this demand will not be repeated?”

“What security *can* you have? I will give you my word.”

“Bah!”

“I will take an oath.”

“*Your* oath!”

“You can but have a promise. I will sign what papers you will; I will pledge myself to molest you no more.”

“You pledged yourself to the same effect years ago. How have you kept your promise?”

“There has been no help for it. I have been in great trouble.”

“Say what amount will satisfy you.”

"Five thousand pounds."

"Five thousand pounds! It is not possible that I can give you such an amount."

"It is a mere trifle. I might have demanded double. Your brother is your banker. You have but to ask for the money to obtain it."

"I am not well," said Wilford, faintly. "I grow giddy with all this talking. My head seems in a whirl. Give me time to think!"

"Certainly you shall have time to think. I am not ungenerous, nor unkind, nor forgetful of the past. I have no desire to quarrel. Will you take my hand now? It would be far better that we should remain friends as of old."

Again she stretched out her hand, while a smile full of malice and cruelty

disturbed the rigid lines of her face. With an effort Wilford conquered a feeling of intense repugnance, and took her hand into his, holding it for a moment, and then dropping it.

“Yes, let us be friends,” he said, in a low voice.

“And when will you let me know your decision? When will you come and see me again?” She varied her inquiry with something of a return to her old fawning manner. “Shall we say to-morrow—at the same hour?”

“To-morrow. Be it so. I will be here.” He stopped for a few moments, and then went on with an air of greater determination than he had evinced for some time during the interview. “But remember, if I pay this money—I say *if*—for at present I am undecided——”

She smiled grimly, bowing her head.

"You will understand that I do so because I desire that certain facts known to us only should not be revealed; because to learn of these things might be annoying and painful to others—not because I have any fears as to what the result of a revelation might be so far as I personally am concerned; I fear a disclosure only on account of its effects upon others. You understand me?"

"It is hardly necessary, I think," she answered, quietly, "for us to enter upon a question of this nature."

"And," he said, suddenly, "I have a condition to impose."

"A condition!" the woman repeated, frowning.

"I will do nothing until I have seen Regine."

"Certainly. You shall see Regine; not now, however—indeed, she is not here now."

"But to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, if you desire it."

Without another word he passed out, pale, perplexed, lost in thought. Almost mechanically he walked along the Strand, blind and deaf to all surrounding sights and sounds, in the direction of the Temple.

Madame Boisleury stood for some moments with an air of reflection. Then she smiled, rubbing her hands. There was quite a metallic sound about the last-named proceeding, from the clinking together of her rings. She looked at her old, furrowed, painted face in the glass, with an air of intense satisfaction, adjusting the folds of her soiled *blonde* cap,

and rectifying the tangled, shrivelled, artificial flowers. Then she went out, and knocked at the door of the adjoining apartment.

"Who's there?" said a woman's voice, loud, but not unpleasing, with a slightly foreign accent.

"Regine," answered Madame Boisfleury, in a low tone, "it's only *me*. Let me in. I've seen him. I think all will go well. I have much to tell you."

"Don't trouble yourself. My ear was at the keyhole. I heard all!"

"Open the door, at any rate," said Madame Boisfleury, rather angrily. "I want my dress hooked."

## CHAPTER V.

## PUTTING A CASE.

WILFORD hurriedly entered Martin's chambers in the Temple.

"Well, old friend," cried Martin, in a cheerful tone. "You're better this morning. Let me hear you say so, first of all. Tell me you've slept soundly, have got over all faintness and giddiness, and are now yourself again."

Wilford seemed not to hear his

friend's inquiries. He flung himself into a chair, wiping his forehead and gazing round him abstractedly.

"Thank God!" he said, hoarsely, "I am here again! I can breathe freely now. I feel as though I had been poisoned: inhaling infected air. I have been half stifled, I believe—half mad, perhaps. There's warrant for that even!" and he laughed wildly.

"What is the matter, Wil?" asked Martin, looking at him curiously, suspiciously.

Wilford made no answer; he was rolling his head from side to side in the easy chair, swaying about restlessly, his fingers fidgeting, twisting together. A thought occurred to Martin.

"You're not followed?" he said.

"Followed!" Wilford repeated with a start. "I never thought of that! Yet

the thing *may* be; nay, is likely enough—more than likely. They may have set a watch upon me again. He may have tracked me here, even. Heaven! They may come to *you*, Martin.”

“One moment. We’ll take care of that.”

Martin left the room. He closed the outer door of his chambers. There was a strange expression upon his face as he did this. “How dreadful!” he muttered, “if he should be going mad!” and he turned quite pale. Speedily, however, he regained command of himself. He had full possession of his old, calm, pleasant manner when he re-entered his room, and said with a laugh—

“Now our foes may do their worst! We are closed in here, against the world. A man’s house is his castle.

We'll make the same rule apply to chambers. Now, Wil, make yourself at home: rest yourself, get on to that sofa, and lie full-length if you like; it is not long enough, I grant, that sofa: but we can annex a chair, and adapt the thing to your lordship's grand proportions. Compose yourself, and take a cigar: a smoke in the morning is wonderfully soothing, only the tobacco shouldn't be too strong, and you shouldn't smoke too much of it; these cigars are just the thing, beautifully mild, and yet with a good flavour. Have one: that's right, there's a dear old boy; and don't be in a hurry to talk. We've got the whole day before us, and the night, too, for that matter. You'll be all the better for being quiet a little. I can see that."

Martin's pleasant-toned voice, and

quiet, winning way—half-playful, half-serious—had all the tranquillizing effects he had contemplated they would have upon his friend. Wilford was soon stretched upon the sofa, holding a lighted cigar to his lips. He had yielded to the plan which treated him almost as an invalid. Indeed, Martin's tone, while it was undoubtedly considerate and tender, had yet in it an authority and decision which did not admit of denial, and Wilford was hardly conscious himself how immediately he had given way to Martin's will.

“ I am afraid I trouble you greatly, Martin, coming in here at this hour of the day, lounging and smoking, and making both of us idle.”

“ Don't talk of such a thing. Do you fancy that idleness isn't

pleasant ? Do you think one isn't very glad of an excuse for doing nothing? You're not inconveniencing me. For publishers and printers I don't feel called upon to answer. And why should I trouble myself about their affairs? They don't give me a share in their profits. I wish they did."

"But I am really keeping you from work."

"And I am really grateful to you for doing so. There, have I said enough? In truth I am in no humour for work to-day. I got up with a positive loathing for pens, ink, and paper, and I was nearly invoking a curse upon Caxton for inventing printing. Unreasonable, of course, since I get my living by it. But I can't work this morning. I'm

like King Richard, 'not in the vein,' especially as you have dropped in for a chat."

"I feel that you are only saying all this out of kindness for me, Martin."

"Well, and suppose that is so," said Martin, laughing, "you ought to be polite enough not to see it! Are you going about inquiring into the reality and soundness of men's virtues and good qualities generally? Are you going to return a verdict that mine are all hollow and sham? Let us say that I was going to be busy this morning; do you account me such a curmudgeon of my time that I cannot give some of it up—all if need be—to you, or any friend that may make a call upon it? Nonsense, Wil. Business may go—

where it likes. You've come for a long talk, and I'm very glad of it; the longer the better; my time's yours, and always shall be. There are very few things I've got to give away, but I have *that*. And now—by degrees, mind, and without the slightest hurry—for indeed there's no occasion for it—you shall tell me all about yourself, and how *you* are, and how Mrs. Wilford is, and how little Master Wilford is, and what may be the latest nursery revelations with regard to him. Now, sir, that's the programme. Smoke your cigar, gently and cosily, and begin when and where you like."

"You don't know how much good it does me to hear you talk like this, Martin."

"I intend it to do you some good."

"For, indeed, I have need of kindness. I am placed in a position of extreme pain. I hardly know which way to turn; what to do. I have every need of kindness and support, consideration and good counsel."

"Is this sanity?" Martin asked himself.

"I have been suffering torture of late. While I have much, I know, to thank myself for, I yet seem to be the victim of a conspiracy—of, indeed, absolute persecution on the part of others."

"Surely this is monomania!" Martin murmured.

"I have much to tell you, and yet I have a difficulty in beginning."

"The difficulty has been felt by

others—it is always difficult to begin. But the difficulty is half imaginary. It doesn't really matter; begin anywhere; take up what thread you will of the story, we'll weave all into shape and meaning afterwards."

Wilford paused a few moments, lost in thought.

"Martin," he said at length, "a man is guilty of many follies in the course of his life."

"I have not a word to say against that proposition."

"Especially in his youth."

"Especially in his youth," Martin assented.

"Follies—sins——"

"The terms are almost convertible."

"Which he would not wish to be known to the rest of the world."

"Few biographies can afford to be

really, wholly truthful. We can't print everything as it stands in the original manuscript. There must always be editing and revising, which mean altering and suppressing, if only on the public's account."

"Probably, Martin, you would not wish that the whole of *your* life should be known to all?"

"Certainly, Wil, I should not; though it may be that I am no worse than my neighbours. But I concede that I am not an angel, and that the whole of my life has not been conducted upon angelic principles. It is only to say that I am a man, to signify that I have been—and am, for that matter—periodically a fool. We can only hope to grow wiser and better as we grow older. Most men of our age can cordially acquiesce in the axiom that at

twenty-one we were all decided fools: it would be a matter of congratulation if we could be quite sure that we are less foolish now than we were then. But to what is this philosophical inquiry to lead us?"

"And the reason for this desire for concealment," Wilford went on, without remark upon the question, "is it not because disclosure would make one seem less worthy in the eyes of others? Because one would by it forfeit much of the esteem and regard of one's family and friends?"

"Certainly those are good motives for concealment."

"And especially of the concealment of——"

Wilford paused, as though in search of a word.

"Let us say 'indiscretions,'" suggested

Martin. "The word is a mild one, but society has agreed that it shall, if need be, bear a strong and wide significance."

"Of the concealment of indiscretions, then,—from the knowledge of one's wife."

Martin started a little at this. He abandoned the tone of banter in which he had been inclined to treat the conversation as far as it had hitherto gone.

"It seems to me, Wil," he said, seriously, "that the fewer things one conceals from the knowledge of one's wife, the better."

He waited for a moment or so and then resumed, rather sadly.

"I can only offer you bachelor counsel, my friend. It is possible I may be wrong—unworldly and unwise. It is difficult for the unmarried to set

up their idealities against the realities of the married. It has not been given to me to know the happiness of marriage—possibly it never will be given to me. I can only base my judgment, therefore, upon fancy. It seems to me that if Heaven had been pleased to give me a wife, I should not seek to appear to her other than I really am. I should not care to be perpetually playing a part before her. I should like her to know me thoroughly, and both the good and evil that may be in me. Certainly, I would hide little from her. Yet, I should hope, upon the whole, to merit her love, and to win it, not by a trick, or a concealment, but by truth and honesty. I should hope that, after allowance was made for the bad, a residuum

of good would yet remain, sufficient to justify her affection in the past and in the present, as I know that my whole conduct should be framed to deserve and hold her love and her trust in the future. But this may be folly. A man cannot give practical advice upon subjects with which he has no practical acquaintance. So again, I ask, why are we drifting into these new topics ? ”

Wilford did not answer. He moved about uneasily. He drew hard at his cigar ; but it had gone out, and he flung it into the grate. He passed his hand across his forehead.

“ Let us put a case,” he said, after a few moments.

“ Certainly,” Martin answered, add-

ing, in a low voice, “ ‘putting a case ’ sounds less committing than ‘making a confession,’ but it amounts to much the same thing. Yet, a veil is a veil, no matter how flimsy it may be. Let us hear your case, Wil,” he said, aloud.

Wilford rose from the sofa, and walked up and down the room several times with a very disturbed air. He stopped short, suddenly.

“Let us put then,” he said, “the case of a man who”—but he was unable to continue. He walked to the window.

“No, Martin,” he resumed at length, “I can’t talk to you in that sham way. The case I want to put is my own. Let me say so at once, plainly. I have a story to tell—a very painful one. Let me ask,

in beginning it, your forbearance, your sympathy, your pity."

"Surely, Wil," said Martin, kindly.

"I ask this, because I fear that in my conduct you may find much to condemn. I must tell you this story, Martin ; and yet I dread lest, having told it, I should forfeit your esteem,—lest I should incur your censure. You don't know how hard that would be to bear. You cannot think, Martin, how cruelly the loss of such a good, proved friend as you have been, would fall upon me now.

"But you exaggerate, Wil. You know—you must be sure—that what you dread is not possible."

"Listen, then. We parted as school-boys, to meet again as men. A long interval was thus passed, in

which we were unknown to each other—an interval of many years, and not the least important years of life. We have given to each other the broad outline of the manner of our lives during that time. With that general account we have been satisfied; indeed the matter seemed to be hardly worth deep inquiry, or dwelling upon, or returning to. Perhaps we have been too busy with the present and the future to interest ourselves very greatly in the past. A brief sketch of the interval, and we were both ready enough to resume our old friendship, and place it on a basis not less strong, and true, and sure, than it was years ago.

“This, however, you *did* know. That many of the years passed by you at the university had been spent by me out of England. That my absence re-

sulted in a great measure from a serious disagreement with my father. That I returned home at last upon the receipt of intelligence that he was dangerously ill. That I arrived in time to see him—but unavailingly. I was denounced as a prodigal son; I was unforgiven—disinherited. The estates were left to my brother. In due time I came to London,—relinquished my name,—found you in the Temple,—married. So far my history to the present time, as it is known to you. But it is important that I should take it up at a much earlier date.”

After a slight pause, he resumed.

“You have heard me speak of my uncle, Colonel Hugh Hadfield?”

“I remember to have heard you mention his name. I have little recollection of anything else concerning him.”

“He was my father’s junior by some few years. He had passed a considerable portion of his life in India. He retired from the service possessed of a large fortune. The brothers had seen very little of each other, and were not particularly good friends; indeed, that was hardly to be wondered at, they had lived apart for so long. But some few months of the year my uncle always spent at the Grange. He occupied, too, a handsome town house in Harley Street. During the winter he resided generally at Paris. He was something of an invalid. His constitution had been much tried by the climate, I fancy, and probably by other causes. He had nothing of that robust appearance my father retained almost to the last; he looked much older, was very thin and bent. I first recollect

him—and I must have been then quite a child—walking about the grounds of the Grange in the summer time, dressed in very light-coloured clothes ; on his head a large straw hat, bound round with muslin many times folded. I know his appearance used to strike me as very strange—his skin was so yellow, his eyes so fierce and rolling, his eyebrows so jet black, although his crumpled hair was as white as snow. He was incessantly smoking, — drinking cold brandy and water,—very imperious and violent in his manner ; with a habit of swearing hard at everything and everybody. Yet he was kind too, in his way, to my brother and myself. I believe I was especially a favourite of his ; possibly because I was the eldest son. He was always making us presents :

now, of all sorts of Indian toys; now, of costly articles of jewellery; now, he would station us in the corners of the room while he flung guineas to us. We were to keep all we could catch, and he would swear at us, and threaten to thrash us well, if we missed any. He was well known at Grilling Abbots, and popular there,—and no wonder; his purse was at everybody's service; and although his manner was formidable, he did many kindnesses to the people about, and they couldn't help liking even while they feared him. Indeed, he died during one of his visits to the Grange, and was buried in the family mausoleum — unfeignedly regretted, I do believe.

“You may remember of old that I had the reputation of being a spoilt

child—and there was good reason for it—I was over-indulged; my slightest whims were humoured. My father and my uncle joined in this; and especially if my inclination took the form of a precocious manliness. My first ten-pound note was earned by my taking my pony over a fence in a very reckless fashion, nearly breaking my neck and the pony's too. But the two old gentlemen were loud in their applause; my uncle especially. I was encouraged to be daring, madcap, domineering. They only laughed at me when my temper, upon some petty provocation, broke all bounds, and left me storming with passion. I was never checked, never prompted to place restraint upon myself. You may remember what trouble this brought upon me at school—the incessant squabbles and difficulties

and fights I was ever in. Of course all this would have been ordered otherwise had my mother's life been spared; but, as you know, she was taken from us not long after Stephen's birth.

“Though upon this subject my father and my uncle were agreed, there were others upon which they differed greatly. My uncle's visits to the Grange, though they were renewed year by year, generally terminated abruptly and unpleasantly. Some trivial difference of opinion would at last grow into an open quarrel, and the Colonel would suddenly take his departure, vowing that he would never again set foot within the Grange. This happened frequently; but he returned at a stated period to pay another visit. In fact, the brothers agreed better at a distance; they had been

too long apart to know really much of each other; they were not able to make allowance for each other's peculiarities of disposition and frame of mind and habits of thought. Their intimacy had no better foundation than the fact of their relationship; it was not made real and natural by the existence of friendship between them. They met because they were brothers—but for that fact there was nothing to bring them together; and it was not sufficient to form a ground for permanent union, especially as it was backed up by no kind of liking or sympathy. Probably each thought the other unreasonably prejudiced, and overbearing, and angry upon small provocation, and my father, as the head of the house, may have been inclined to claim a recognition of his position to

a greater extent than the Colonel, who had achieved his own fortune in his own way, owing little to his family, was disposed to allow. So they only tolerated each other: their fraternity hardly merited a more flattering description.

“One day—I forget the reason, if indeed I ever knew it—their periodical quarrel was more than usually violent and prolonged. My uncle left the Grange in a furious rage. I was accustomed to his angry departures, but I never remember one so stormy as this had been. And he took a long time to soften. The period for his return to us approached, but he showed little symptom of yielding. At last my father wrote formally to him, requesting his usual visit. The Colonel replied courteously but firmly. He regretted that he should be compelled for the

present to deny himself the pleasure of visiting his relations at the Grange; circumstances over which, unfortunately, he had no control demanded his presence in London. My father was seriously annoyed at this; however, he commanded himself sufficiently to enable him to write again to the Colonel, pressing him in the kindest way to return to the Grange. The Colonel again made answer in terms something similar to his first letter, but concluding with a request that, in his inability to visit the country, my father would give his sanction to my passing some weeks in Harley Street. With this evidence of his brother's good-will, my father was obliged to be content. The terms of the compromise were accepted. I visited London in lieu of my uncle's return to the Grange.

“Looking back upon one’s life, how many causes for regret there are, arising out of circumstances apparently of a wholly accidental character? How many times I have sorrowed over that chance visit to London, that residence of some months in my uncle’s house in Harley Street! For to that I seem to have cause to attribute all the troubles of my existence.

“You may conceive that my uncle was not a very well chosen monitor for a young man on his entrance into life. He had lived abroad very much; had acquired habits of thought much at variance with convention; had a contempt for the usages of society, especially if they came in contact at all with his manner of life, his tastes,

or his pursuits; and, worse than this, he entertained certain convictions which came down to him possibly from a past age, from a less refined system of civilization. He clung to old-world ideas upon knowledge of the world; comprehending in that, as an important part, knowledge of sin. Many before him have held a like opinion. He thought it desirable that youth should study both good and evil. That virtue, if it was to be attained at all, should be attained by wading through vice; as if it were necessary to drain wickedness to the dregs in order to know the taste of it! I feel a sort of shame in seeming to find an excuse for myself in blaming an old man who is dead, and who, whatever his

faults, was certainly in intention kind to me. He never knew, I believe, the harm he was doing me; he never guessed the terrible harvest it would be mine to reap for all the seed he was then sowing. Let me dismiss the subject as briefly as I may. My visits to London — then commenced, and frequently repeated afterwards — were of great misfortune to me, if only because they aggravated all the bad points of my character. Judge yourself what was likely to be the result of educating to such views of life a high-spirited country-bred boy with ready-developed tendencies to mischief; of encouraging him to such knowledge of the world as I have hinted at; of applauding him when, with his young, crimson, earnest face,

he bent over the gaming-table and tried not to pale when his money was swept away from him,—it being a gentleman's duty not to flinch at such dispensations of Fortune,—or when he never missed the wine in its circuit of the table, and, staggering and noisy, was, as a consequence, led away to bed, at last, by the servants.

“You may think that I have no pleasure in this relation, Martin, but it is necessary that you should be informed in some detail of the manner in which the interval of our separation was passed.

“My uncle's household was a curious one,—ill-regulated as his own habits. To the usual mismanagement of a bachelor's house was superadded complication arising from the fact of his long residence abroad. On his first arrival in England he had been accom-

panied by several native servants. These, however, he had one by one sent back to India, with one exception. He still retained in his service, fulfilling the duties of valet, a half-caste, who had been many years with him. This man, born at Pondicherry—his father a Frenchman—was very useful to my uncle—knew all his ways, accompanied him wherever he went, assisted him to dress, wrote letters for him, even cooked for him appetizing Indian dishes,—when his health failed him, and no other efforts could satisfy his palate. So, when the other servants were dismissed, Dominique Pichot was still retained. A docile, faithful, attached creature, as my uncle was of opinion until the last; a subtle, treacherous scoundrel, as I have good reason to know.

“The housekeeper was an English-

woman, a Mrs. Corder. She, also, had been many years in my uncle's service,—the widow, I fancy, of a soldier of his regiment who had been for some time his servant in India, and had died there. But of this I am not certain. She was a woman of low origin, who had compensated for her want of education by a certain quickness and cunning. She had no sort of scruple, was very grasping and ambitious, and by some means had acquired considerable influence over my uncle. She was very vain, though she must have been nearly fifty when I first saw her; but by artificial means she contrived to look considerably younger. She was very fond of dress, was selfish, avaricious, mean, wily, altogether despicable, but that her manner had about it something

I then thought winning, and that her power in the household was almost absolute. She affected to welcome me cordially to my uncle's house, urged the frequent repetition of my visits, while yet I believed she entertained great fears lest my uncle's friendship for me should extend to his constituting me the sole heir to his fortune. It was soon evident to me that a certain understanding existed between this Mrs. Corder and Pichot, but the nature or object of this was not at the time intelligible to me.

“It is not to be supposed that, boy as I was, my uncle cared for me to be continually with him during my residence in Harley Street. He had frequent engagements, was often at the club, or in the society of his friends—for the most part retired officers whom he

had known in India. I was thus left much alone. It was some relief from the dulness of that large empty house to seek the company of Pichot, or of the housekeeper. They were only too happy to be of use to me. Let it be understood that I was likely to unlearn none of my uncle's lessons from these associates. They were utterly depraved. I blush now to think of the gross adulations they lavished upon me, the coarse compliments which then gave me pleasure, and won for these creatures my regard. They were only too happy to aid me in my search after knowledge of the world. Sin could hardly have had more accomplished coadjutors. They vied with each other in flattering and pampering me,—in seeking to serve me in any way, no matter how shameful.

“One object of their servility at length became known to me. It appeared that they had been long secretly married; that during one of my uncle’s absences from London a child had been born of their union—a boy who was already some years old, and whom they had christened Alexis. Pichot had always accompanied my uncle on his visits to the Grange, but it was not until his last visit that Mrs. Corder had also gone with him. His health was then very feeble, and he required a constant nurse, and during his last illness, and a short time previous to his death at the Grange, the housekeeper—then known as Madame Pichot—was sent for from London to attend to her master.

“I undertook, by their desire, to reveal to my uncle the fact of this

marriage, to intercede for them, and to obtain his forgiveness. The task was not an easy one. My uncle, himself a bachelor, had been prone to make matrimony ever a special subject for raillery and satire, perhaps after the habit of the unmarried. When informed of the fact he was furious, vowed he would never see either of them again, that they should both quit the house instantly, and abused me roundly for undertaking to advocate their cause. Calmly these people appeared to bow to his orders; they prepared to depart, with yet, I believe, a full intention to remain. I was afraid I had injured their position by my unsuccessful eloquence. They only laughed when I expressed these fears. Probably

they knew my uncle better than I did. The housekeeper availed herself of an opportunity to see him. They had a long and violent conversation. It seemed to me that a sort of compact had been concluded between them.

“Madame Pichot informed me that, with her husband, she was to continue in my uncle’s service. More than this, that the child was to be permitted to reside in my uncle’s house, provided it never made its presence known, either to his eyes or his ears. Further, she informed me that her marriage with Dominique Pichot was of an earlier date than I had imagined, and that there existed, born of the marriage, another child, some years older than Alexis,—a girl,—very nearly of my own age,—whose name was Regine Stephanie

Pichot, and that *she*, also, would shortly appear at the house in Harley Street."

A loud thump on the outer door of Martin's chambers here disturbed Wilford in his narrative.

## CHAPTER VI.

## REGINE.

"DON'T let that noise disturb you," said Martin; "nobody can come in. The castle will stand a siege, if need be."

Wilford continued his narrative.

"The boy Alexis, when he first came to Harley Street, must have been eight or nine years old, though he was very small for his age. He had an ugly, wicked, impish face even then.

He had little, cunning green eyes, was lividly pale, and very thin. I know that if you ever attempted to stop him or to take hold of him, he had a wily way of eluding your grasp, wriggling from under your hand with a serpentine sort of movement, for he was very lithe and supple, and seemed more as though his frame were made of sinew than of bone. There are some persons in regard to whom it seems right to follow the instincts which prompt us on the instant to mistrust and hate. It was not possible to resist this feeling on seeing this boy Alexis, young as he was. Liar, and cheat, and spy, were written on every line of his face. He was the worthy child of Dominique and Madame Pichot. I make no doubt that the story of his origin was authentic.

He possessed the characteristics of both parents in a marked degree.

“The Pichots were so far true to the agreement they had made with their employer, that they sedulously kept out of his sight the boy Alexis. It was a large rambling house, and there was little difficulty about such a proceeding, especially as my uncle never entered more than three or four rooms. That he was aware of the boy’s presence in the house I fully believe. Occasionally the boy was sent out with letters or messages, and my uncle could not but have known who had been the bearer of these, though he never permitted his knowledge to be betrayed by his looks or manner. Once, too, he had been looking out of an open window at the back of the house, and had amused

himself with watching certain antics performed by the boy Alexis, who was, however, entirely unconscious that his sports had a spectator. The boy had quite a clown's cleverness in the way of walking on his hands and turning summersaults, and other tumbler tricks. He was far beyond the ordinary accomplishments of boys of his age in these respects. Some leads at the back, the roofs of certain outbuildings, formed a platform for his performance. My uncle was said to have been greatly amused; he laughed noisily after his manner, and flung out money to the lad. The Pichots, who had been in dread of a different result, congratulated themselves on the turn events had taken.

“Soon after the boy Alexis, came, as I have said, the girl called Regine

Stephanie, reputed to be the child of Dominique Pichot and his wife the housekeeper. I may now state my firm belief of what, at the time, I had no kind of suspicion,—that Regine was not the daughter of the Pichots. My conviction is that, as a condition of their remaining in my uncle's service, they agreed to acknowledge this girl as born of their union, as their lawful offspring, and on this account it became necessary for them to antedate their marriage several years. In return for their doing this, my uncle consented to forgive their marriage, and permitted their son Alexis to reside with them. A suspicion that has always haunted me in regard to this girl, I have never been able to confirm or to confute—  
—but I have long been of opinion that if her paternity was not to be

directly attributed to my uncle, still the secret of her parentage was well known to him, and that he had some object in view in misdirecting all conjecture on the subject. She was born, it was admitted, in India; as a child had been sent to France, to be educated at a preparatory school at Dunkerque, afterwards at a finishing academy at Brussels. She was probably about eighteen on the occasion of my seeing her for the first time at the house in Harley Street. During the absence of my uncle from London, Madame Pichot had been despatched to Brussels. She had remained there some weeks. She returned, bringing with her the girl Regine—Madlle. Pichot, as she was then called.

“It was hardly possible not to feel a certain curiosity in regard to Regine.

Although I was then prepared to believe the current story that she was the child of the Pichots, I could not help remarking that there was something peculiar about the position she occupied in that strange household. Whereas the existence of the boy Alexis was almost altogether ignored by my uncle, he seemed to take a pleasure in recognizing the presence of Regine. He frequently sent for her. She was allowed to enter what rooms she pleased. She was constantly in the drawing-room. My uncle's conduct to her was always courtly and kind. He made her many presents, especially of jewels and lace. He bought for her a superb piano: on this she would play to him when he was at home in the evening. She was an accomplished musician, though as a singer her voice

was limited in compass, and without much flexibility. She had a pretty pony-carriage, in which she often drove out, though he forbade her to enter the parks; and yet, with all this, she had tacitly at least to recognize Dominique and his wife as her parents. Before I had entertained any doubt as to the truth of the story of her origin, I could not but observe that she always shrank from such poor maternal endearments as Madame Pichot permitted to herself; while any advances that Dominique Pichot made to her, any attempts on his part to assume influence or authority over her, were met with a scorn that was quite savage in its intensity; notwithstanding, little ever occurred in any way to reveal what I now believe to have been the real state of the case. Indeed, I remember that

when, on one of the few occasions during the latter part of his life, of my father's visiting London, and calling at the house in Harley Street during my residence there, he saw the girl Regine, and, struck with her appearance, asked who she was, he seemed to be quite satisfied with the reply he received, that she was the daughter of Monsieur and Madame Pichot, the valet and house-keeper of his brother the Colonel.

“Her manner was very silent and sullen when I first became acquainted with her. She seemed predetermined to regard all around her as her enemies. When addressed she sometimes made no answer—always spoke coldly and bluntly, and with averted eyes. She seemed to ask for nothing so much as to be left alone—unnoticed. She showed no

desire to conciliate—was indifferent, apparently, as to the opinion others might entertain concerning her. If any one persisted in attention to her there was something almost dangerous in the angry look of defiance that lit up her large black eyes. Yet, in the presence of my uncle, she became quite a different creature. She was so quiet and gentle, and there was such a winning grace in her every gesture;—the tones of her voice softened,—her eyes lost their usual hard brilliance,—and quite a limpid tenderness beamed in them beneath the deep shadow of her sweeping lashes. There was a wonderful charm about the limber ease of her every attitude. . She was so natural and unconfined in all her movements, her frame so lithe, her hands and

feet so small and beautifully formed. Who can wonder that the old man yielded to the spell of her presence?—who could have resisted it? Yet who could have recognized this winning Regine in the frowning Mademoiselle Pichot,—reserved, repellent, silent, before her supposed parents? In this unattractive character my uncle had never seen her.”

“She was rather below the middle stature. Her complexion was very dark,—almost swarthy; she had very little colour, though now and then a sort of underflush would glow in her cheeks. Her features were small but strongly defined, her mouth rather stern,—its lines were so marked and rigid,—but her teeth were beautifully white and regular. Her eyebrows were masculine in their strength, and

density, and blackness; her head was small and well formed; her hair very rich and glossy, growing rather low down on her forehead, from which she wore it turned off, but in a pretty waving line, coming to a sort of peak in the centre. She was vain—fond of rich dress of rather pronounced colour, and wore always heavy ear-rings and necklaces. There was a foreign look about her—almost a barbaric look—when, as she was fond of doing, she had attired herself in her gayest apparel to appear in the drawing-room and play and sing for my uncle's amusement. She had a gold-coloured dress, covered with Indian embroidery, which my uncle had given her, and to which she had added fantastic trimming formed of the scarlet feathers of some tropical bird. There

was a daring about this violent contrast of colour which struck me very much. Certainly she supported the magnificence superbly. I remember her well in that dress. I can see her in thought as vividly as though she were now so attired, present before me. She spoke English perfectly, but with a foreign accent; the result probably of her education and long residence abroad.

“Her demeanour, in regard to myself, was, on the one hand, without the anger and sullenness which she invariably exhibited in her intercourse with the Pichots, while, on the other, it was entirely divested of the winning charm which distinguished her manner towards the Colonel. She regarded me, as it seemed, with no stronger feeling than indifference; she was supremely careless

as to what I said or did. Whether she saw me or not,—whether we met or parted,—she never spoke to me unless I first addressed her; was entirely heedless apparently whether she won my like or dislike,—never courted my good opinion in any kind of way. I was no more to her than one of the articles of furniture in the house. I was less than some of them; the piano, for instance, or the couch covered with tiger skins on which she was fond of reclining. I confess I was piqued with this want of recognition of me. Each time that I came to London this feeling seemed renewed with greater force. The more indifference she displayed, the more I felt inclined to change this indifference into some warmer feeling. I felt that I could claim to establish in her breast some superior emotion. I was

a mere boy at the time, remember,—pampered and spoilt,—accustomed to have my own way in everything, and I could not but greatly admire this beautiful Regine. I had seen her both before the Pichots, and in the presence of my uncle. I knew how wonderfully witching she could be if she listed. I assured myself that she was but playing a part, when she appeared as the sullen unattractive daughter of my uncle's servants. I tortured myself with thinking how I could work a change in her. My admiration for her mounted into a sort of mania. Now, I tried to move her by my devotion; now, by repaying her coldness with an equal neglect of her. Either way, she was little affected—her conduct did not change.

“The Pichots were not slow to preceive the state of my mind on this subject.

Possibly I had not cared to make a secret of the matter. I found myself soon concerting with them means to soften Regine. Eagerly they listened to me, promising all the aid in their power on my behalf. They undertook that the views of Regine should undergo a change, and *that* before very long."

The noise at the door, which had once before interrupted Wilford, here occurred again. This time Martin started up.

"Hush!" he said softly, "I think there was something more than a knock that time. I think I heard the sound of a letter falling through the slit in the door."

He quietly went out into the passage.

"Yes," he said, returning, "I was right; a letter, and addressed to you."

He handed to Wilford a letter, of small size, and written on thin foreign paper. The writing was cramped and faint. Wilford started as he regarded it, reading the address.

“Who left this?” he asked, eagerly.

“We’ll soon see,” said Martin.

He hurried to the outer door of the chambers, but no one was there. He listened—there was the sound as of footsteps descending the stairs. He closed the door again, and passing into a different room to that in which they had been sitting, he threw up the window. From that point of view he had command of the entrance to the block of buildings in which the chambers were situated, and could see who passed from the staircase into the roadway. Very shortly he returned to Wilford.

“It was left by a boy, I think ; a boy in a French cap.”

But Wilford took little heed of the information. He was occupied, apparently, with his letter. And yet this contained but a very few lines, which he had read over twice in Martin's absence. They were as follows :

“You need not pay the money, and you shall not. *I* say so. Only I must see you, as soon as possible. Come to me after this note has reached you, as quickly as you can. Do not fear—as to the money, or on any other account. You are safe.”

The letter was without date or signature.

For some time he sat contemplating it, frowning. Then there came to him an air of relief, and he seemed to

breathe more freely. Yet he had an evident difficulty in continuing his recital to Martin. Did it occur to him, from what he had read in that letter that his revelation had now become in a measure superfluous—unnecessary? He had, with an evident reluctance, entered upon the task of laying bare to his friend certain hidden things in the past,—of revealing the mysteries of his early life. He had commenced his narrative with a constrained, unwilling manner. He had probably purposed at the outset to give merely the heads of the history; but as he advanced, and the difficulty of his task seemed to diminish, and the interest of his friend to increase,—probably, also, because it seemed in some measure necessary to his own justification, he had entered more and more into

detail. Now an altered intention influenced him,—a change came over him,—his voice and manner were wholly different.

“I hardly know, Martin, why I weary you with all the minutiae of this story; I suppose I grow garrulous as I grow older,” and he laughed faintly. “You can conceive my position, and the—the difficulties and complications likely to arise from it. You understand that I was with rather dangerous people—that I was young enough and weak enough to fall an easy victim, if one had been needed.”

Martin looked at him curiously. He detected at once that Wilford’s opinions upon the expediency of his confession had undergone a change.

“Does he mistrust me?” he asked himself, sighing. Then he added aloud,

“Tell no more than you think right, Wil.”

It was kindly said, and yet it fell upon Wilford's ears rather reproachfully. He rose up uneasily, and walked to the window; there was an agitated, perplexed look in his face. When he spoke again, it was with his face turned from his friend.

“I can tell the rest in a very few words; perhaps the fewer the better. You can understand that these Pichots had an eye to my uncle's wealth. They feared at first that I should become his heir; but gradually they became reconciled to that idea, planning to grow rich by means of the influence they had obtained over me, or through the power they saw their daughter possessed to rule me. I need not

dwell upon these matters," he spoke rapidly. " You must see that there would be an evident inconvenience in these people appearing upon the scene in the present state of things ; especially if they should begin to talk ; they may possess letters, and threaten to produce them ; and it seems these Pichots are now in London, with the exception of the husband, who is ill in Paris. You can judge for yourself, Martin, how hateful it would be to me to have them forcing themselves upon my wife, telling tales to her of the past, of their acquaintance with me in my youth, and so on. You may be sure I would not, if I could help it, have Violet's ear poisoned with all the tattling of these hateful people, and that,

if need be, I would pay any sum to keep them silent. You surely appreciate all this, Martin ? ”

“ And is this all ? ” asked Martin, quietly, after a pause.

“ Yes—all,” Wilford answered, petulantly ; “ what more should there be ? ”

“ And your only anxiety is, lest your wife should see these Pichots, and hear what they may choose to tell her ? ”

“ Yes. What other anxiety should I have ? ”

“ I would have no dealings with these people, I think,” said Martin ; “ certainly I would not buy their silence. Can you trust them even after you have paid them their price ? It seems to me, Wilford, it would be better to trust your wife. I may say, however,

that the whole history is not quite clear to me ; but so far as I can judge, if there are—well, let us say unpleasant circumstances in the past which may come to your wife's knowledge, I maintain that it would be better that she should learn them from you rather than from others."

" Thank you, Martin, for your patience—for your good advice. I will deliberate upon the matter."

" Do nothing rashly, however. You are not going ? "

" Yes, I must go now, indeed," and he moved to the door. There he stopped.

" Martin," he said, with a return to his old manner, and with deep feeling in his voice, " bear with me. Give me still your confidence and

friendship, for indeed I have great need of both. Perhaps I have not spoken to you so fully as I might. Perhaps there are other things to be told to enable you to judge rightly of my history. Forgive me if I have hesitated to enter upon these. Think that the opportunity is not a fitting one, or that I have not time or courage sufficient. I will renew the subject, if I can, on some other occasion ; but I may not now."

Martin had only time to answer these hurried words by a kind pressure of Wilford's hand as he moved away.

"No," said Martin, as he found himself once more alone in his chambers. "Certainly, he has not told me all. I think," he added, with a sigh, "it

is *always* hard for a man to tell *all*."

If some thought of Violet then surged up in his mind, he thrust it down again; and he sought relief and found it, as it may always be found, in hard work for many hours.

## CHAPTER VII.

## MADEMOISELLE BOISFLEURY.

ALEXIS. Was he man or boy? Let us leave the question open and call him Monsieur Alexis; he was more French than English, and there is no such thing as boyhood in France. The infants of that country, almost as soon as they can speak, are capable of *affaires de cœur*, and *tendresses*, and *bonnes fortunes*; they mature so rapidly. While one of our young compatriots is playing heartily at leapfrog, one of theirs is swearing

(*Grand Dieu ! je jure sur la tombe de ma mère, &c.*) devotion to *la belle Celestine*, or mingling tears with the adorable Madame Darville, and with her adorning the grave of her late husband (dead of a small-sword thrust in the right lung), with the most beautiful *immortelles* which the money of the deceased and deceived *mari* (how despicable the word seems to sound to French ears!) could possibly purchase. Monsieur Alexis sat at one of the windows on the second floor of the house in Stowe Street; the reader has already been introduced to the apartment. Monsieur Alexis was amusing himself with opening and shutting the window at short intervals, looking out up and down the street expectantly, breathing on the panes of glass and drawing on the clouded surface so obtained caricatures of a primitive design,

or scribbling initial letters with a very dirty finger—he had others to match it—much notched and gnawed at the top, and the nail reduced by his teeth to the very smallest dimensions and the most unattractive form that was anyhow practicable. As an additional pastime, Monsieur Alexis occasionally permitted himself the interesting *délassement* of putting a fly to death by a process of torture as prolonged and painful as his ingenuity—not contemptible in that respect—could devise.

“Is he coming?” asked some one sitting at the other end of the room, whose restless foot kept up an impatient tapping on the floor.

“I don’t see him,” Alexis answered, after looking out, apparently rather pleased at having it in his power to give a disappointing answer.

“If he doesn’t come—” some one began, and then stopped.

The speaker was a woman, of small stature, her figure well-proportioned, but inclined to be rather stout than slight. She was of very dark complexion, her hair jet black—it seemed to be almost blue where the light fell upon it—the black was so intense, and the absence of any warm colour in it so complete. She had small, handsomely formed features, though the lower part of her face was somewhat too massive and hard in its lines. There was the shadow of a dark down upon her upper lip, which she was now compressing and biting, in some anger and impatience. Her eyes were very brilliant; enhanced in that quality by her strongly defined, thick, black eyebrows, which, unconsciously, perhaps, she brought down now and then in a very

fierce and threatening frown. She wore a dark silk dress; some black lace, much after the manner of a Spanish mantilla, fell from the back of her head on to her ample shoulders; a twisted gold chain circled her grandly formed throat; heavy ornaments of red coral and dead gold hung from her delicate ears; her small, supple hands were decorated with several superb rings; —her appearance altogether was very striking, but it was not wholly attractive. There was something startling about the fire of those dark eyes, and the bistrous circles of which they were the gleaming centres. It seemed as though she despised all charm of girlishness, or softness of manner, or restraint of emotion. She was angry and im-

patient. She did not care to conceal this fact. She beat upon the carpet with her foot, or drummed with her clenched hand upon the table. As to age, she had passed her *première jeunesse*. She looked thirty. She was probably younger, for women of her brunette complexion are generally not so old as they appear; with the blonde, the converse of the proposition holds good.

“If he should not come——” she repeated.

“Well, if he should not come, Mademoiselle Regine?” Monsieur Alexis asked mockingly. They both spoke with a strong foreign accent. “What will happen then?”

“I shall think you have cheated me, little boy, and I shall punish you,” she said in a meaning way, with a very angry frown.

Alexis glanced at her, as though to be sure that he had rightly heard. Perhaps from the expression of her face he judged it best to make no further reply. He looked again from the window, and with his head turned from the woman—Mademoiselle Regine as he called her—he indulged himself with the relaxation of twisting his features into a sufficiently hideous grimace. By this means he discovered that a new source of gratification was available to him. A servant in one of the opposite houses, cleaning the windows, paused in her dangerous employment, attracted evidently by the facial contortions of Monsieur Alexis. Was it not possible, by persistence in a course of elaborate grimace, so to fascinate and bewilder the poor woman until in the end, her attention attracted

from her work, she should fall headlong out of the window into the street? Monsieur Alexis chuckled aloud exultingly at the brilliance and cheerfulness of this idea! Suddenly he turned to Mademoiselle Regine.

“He’s coming!” he cried.

“Go, then,” she answered, “and—take care—if you listen——” she pointed her forefinger at him warningly, and again she frowned. Alexis evidently understood the incomplete sentence.

“I don’t want to listen,” he muttered sulkily. “Give me the money you promised me.”

She took some gold from a *portemonnaie*, and tossed it to him. She placed her hand upon her heart, as though to stay its turbulent beatings. Alexis hurried from the room. He

had scarcely gone when a tall pale man entered.

“Monsieur Wilford!” the woman said in a low voice, bowing her head.

“Regine!”

She placed a chair for him, and then withdrew to some distance. She remained standing in an almost humble attitude. By her gestures she begged him to be seated. He moved to a chair, but he contented himself with leaning upon it—perhaps because his hands trembled less, grasping tightly the back of the chair. She glanced at him stealthily, her breathing very quick, her fingers very restless. There was silence for some minutes.

“How you have changed!” she said, at length, in a subdued tone.

“Likely enough!” he answered.

"Think how many years have passed since we have met!"

"Had I seen you in the street, I think I should have passed on and not known you. They told me you were happy, gay, successful, fortunate. I see nothing of these in your face. You are very pale and *triste*-looking."

Her foreign manner and accent were more evident now that she was excited, agitated.

"I did not think any one could have been so wretched as I have been, yet I look at you, Wilford—*Monsieur* Wilford, I mean—and it seems to me I may have been mistaken. *Are* you unhappy, *Monsieur* Wilford? But I see that you are."

He had paid but little attention to

these words; he was pondering other things. At last he said, harshly :

“Regine, I never thought that we should meet again on this side the grave.”

“It was inevitable,” she said.

“I thought you were dead.”

She glanced at him reproachfully.

“You hoped so, perhaps?” But he made no answer. She went on passionately in her foreign manner. “Well! and why not? Why should you not hope me to be dead? wish for me to be dead? You cannot have hoped it—prayed for it—more than I have. I should have killed myself a thousand times, but that I am a woman! a fool! a coward! and I shrunk, and shivered, and fainted, and I did not dare! What have I ever done that you, that

any one should wish me living? Nothing! nothing! Oh, how I am miserable!"

"Hush!" he said in a kinder tone; "don't talk like that."

"Why did you think that I was dead?"

"They told me so at——"

He paused.

"Where?"

"At St. Lazare!" he whispered.

She crouched down, hiding her face; then she started up fiercely.

"They lied—they are dogs. They said I was dead, because I had triumphed over them—tricked them—beaten them. At St. Lazare the prisoner who escapes is written down as dead in their books. They are liars!—fools! They watch men carefully enough. They despise women, it seems. They did not think that I could climb—like

a man—like a monkey. That it was nothing to me to climb a water-pipe, on to the roof of the female dormitories, and then drop from the wall, fourteen feet. I was light enough then. What matter that I cut my hands—that I sprained my foot? I could yet run for three miles. I was free! A new name—a new country. Who will recognize me? Who will care what I am—what I have done?"

"Enough of this," he interrupted, angrily; "it was not to learn these prison exploits I came here."

"Who would think, to hear you speak, now, that you ever cared for me—ever loved me?" she said, after a few moments.

"You are wrong. There was passion, folly, madness; but there was not love."

"Not love, as you know it, now?"

"Not love, as I know it, now."

Their eyes met, gleaming rather fiercely. Regine softened.

"It is you who are wrong. It *was* whole, true, honest love. I *will* think so. You shall not rob me of that thought—that consolation. You do not know how precious it is to believe that I was once loved so wholly and truly as you loved me."

"And that love—how did you meet it?—how did you requite it?"

She turned away.

"There are some things you will never know," she said. "There are some secrets you must not seek to share. Perhaps it was because I knew myself better than you did. Perhaps it was because I knew the wretchedness to which your love for me must

lead. Do me at least *this* justice. Whatever others did, *I* did not seek to win your love. I held out no allurements to you. I laid no trap. Nay, I did all I could to make myself repellent to you; to warn you of the danger there would be to you in loving me. Is not that true?"

"It is true, Regine. Would that we had never met!"

"I may say Amen. But what does it avail—the past is past. We have met. For the future——"

"Yes, for the future—let us consider *that*. The past is gone—dead—buried. Its secrets are known only to us. Let them not be revealed. You know that I have seen Madam Pichot——"

"Hush! say Boisfleury. Pichot is an unlucky name. I tremble when I

hear it; I hardly know why. Pray, have you set spies upon me? Have you had me followed? My steps dogged? Who does this? It is not you? Well, we shall see. Never mind. Do not say Pichot,—say Boisfleury.”

“Madam Boisfleury, then. You know the sum of money she has demanded of me?”

“I *do* know—it is shameful! But no matter; as I have said, this money shall not be paid.”

“Why is money wanted? Are you poor?”

“No. We are not rich; but we are not poor. We can live—easily—the more so if we could help—but we can’t—getting into debt, being foolish and extravagant. It is not for us the money is wanted.”

"For whom, then?"

"M. Dominique."

"He is ill, at Paris."

She laughed scornfully.

"He is enduring his sentence: the galleys for twenty years,—let us say for life,—he will not survive the term."

"Upon what charge?"

"A score of charges. He was tried for robbery and attempt to murder. He was sentenced as I have said."

"Of what avail will the money be to him?"

"It will purchase his escape. So madame dreams. She is a devoted wife: let us say *that* for her."

"And the money left by my uncle?"

"All gone—gambled away—flung from the window."

"And the sums received from me?"

“Spent in the same way.”

“I know not what to do. Sometimes I think that if it would purchase me immunity for the future, I would raise this sum; although, to do so, I should have to pay very dearly. I should have to sacrifice all hope of provision after my death for *her* who has such just claims upon me, for my child——”

“You have a child?—a son? Is he like you? Ah! Yes; it seems you love *her* very dearly—more than you ever loved me. It is strange, how little of value your love was to me when it was solely mine; yet *now*, when it has gone from me for ever, how I yearn for it again! It has not wholly gone from me, Monsieur Wilford. Tell me so. Say that you have yet some feeling for me.”

"Why do you talk in this way, Regine," he answered, sternly. "Do you forget everything? Be undeceived. Learn that my love, if love there ever was between us, is now dead, stone dead. It can never be brought to life again. Heaven forbid it ever should! You know what act killed it. You know when, struck by your hand, it fell down and died."

"I know," she moaned, covering her face with her hands. "There is no need to remind me of these things. Yet there may be excuses for me; only they may not be told to you,—least of all by me. So then, now, you love this child, this *wife*?" She laid a stress upon the word.

"I do, with all my soul," he answered, firmly.

"She is good, this Madame Violet—

is not that her name? I heard Madame Boisfleury tell it. She is beautiful—is she not? She is worthy of your love. Oh, how I wish that I could see her! *May* I see her, Monsieur Wilford?”

“*You* see her!” he cried. “Dare not attempt it; dare not think of such a thing! What wrong has *she* ever done to you?”

“You are very cruel, Monsieur Wilford,” said Regine; “but you are right. I ought not to think of seeing her; yet your words seem very bitter. Well, I have deserved them all, and more, much more. You shall be obeyed. I will not seek to see her. I will go. I will quit this London, this country, for ever. An engagement has been offered to me at the theatre of Barcelona. I will accept

it. I will go. I will die far away in a foreign land. You shall never more see my face. Will not this be as you wish? Will there not be in this some reparation, the best, the only atonement I can make, for the wrong done to you in the past, Monsieur Wilford?"

"This will be the best, Regine."

"How your voice sounds cold to me now! How different was it all once. How it was soft and gentle; how your eyes glowed; how your cheeks burned; how your frame trembled, when of old you told me first of your love for me, and took my hand into yours to press with your lips. How all this is changed!"

"Enough, Regine."

"How it is strange! While you

were so good, so tender to me, I cared nothing. I shrank from you. Shall I say it? I despised you: there was something girlish in your love—a gentleness that was hateful to me. How lost I was to all that was honest and pure, and true in it! Now, when you are *brusque* with me, savage almost, Monsieur Wilford, when it seems that a little, and you would strike me, woman though I am; now, when you do strike me, cruelly, most cruelly, with your words and your looks: *now*, my heart beats for you, as it never throbbed before, and I love you now——”

“I will not hear you, Regine.”

“Why were you not so of old? Why did you not change my nature, as the keeper tames the tigress at the Jardin des Plantes, by cruelty, by

oaths and blows, till she crouches at his feet, frightened, docile, faithful, ay, and loving, in her wild-beast way? Would tenderness tame her, do you think? Bah! did it avail with me?—could it avail with me? Why did you not lash me then into right thinking, into right doing?—not now—not now, when it is too late, too late, when I can be no more to you; when I am nothing—nothing—nothing—when you love me no more; when you despise, scorn, hate me——” her passion could no longer find expression in words. She flung herself on her knees, weeping piteously.

Wilford looked with sad eyes at the woman crouching on the floor. He moved about impatiently.

“This is folly,” he said, hoarsely.  
“Can this alter the past? Can you

forget how we parted years ago?"

"No," she answered, in a calmer tone, "I do not forget—I shall never forget. Yet, as I have said, there may be pleas to be urged on my behalf, though you will never—shall never—hear them. Forgive me if my emotion makes me forget myself. I can never forbear. I give way, like an insane person, when I am troubled. Forgive me—my regrets are not so wholly unreasonable as they may seem to be; they are less weak and foolish than you think. Can I but be sorry—passionately sorry—when I think that it was in your power to change me—to work great good in me. Wrong had already been done, heaven knows, and enough of it; but there was some future for me then. I was very young. My thoughts had not taken their present

ugly forms to keep for ever; they might then have been moulded otherwise; there was at least hope of such a thing, and you let the hour go by—you flung away the chance. If, instead of kneeling to me, suing and imploring—humouring my every foolish whim—you had beaten me down to your feet, as I am now,—humbled me and made me weep, then, as I am humbled and weeping now——”

“This is not penitence, Regine, it is simply passion. Half that you say is unintelligible to me; for the rest it is without reason. It is not for me to treat the woman I loved,—or believed I loved,—as cruelly as though I hated her. Change, reform, must come from within, not from without. I did not come here to hear complaints of this

kind, — no, nor to make them, though perhaps I have cause to complain.”

“You have cause,” she said, interrupting him.

“As you have said, the past is past; let us not disinter it. It has been sad enough, and shameful, and wicked; let us heap earth upon it, and not lay it bare to taint the present. Do you think it is *you* only who have suffered? Have I no regrets? Have I no misdeeds—no cruel errors—to lament, to make such atonement for as is now possible?”

“Forgive me.”

“I had forgiven you, believing you to be dead.”

“And now that I am living?”

“I will pray to be able to forgive you, Regine, as I will pray for aid to

act rightly in my present great perplexity. For this money——”

“It shall not be paid—I say it shall not. You may trust me in that, Monsieur Wilford. Show me that you trust me in that. You are free—safe on that subject.”

“But Madame Boisfleury——”

“I will deal with her. Without my aid she is powerless.”

“And for the future, Regine?”

“For the future?” (the tears came into her eyes.) “I see you now for the last time. It shall be as you thought it before. We shall not meet again on this side of the grave. You shall treat me as dead; and I shall be really dead to you. I will never set foot in this country again. For France, I may not go there, but in some other land—does it matter

where? I shall some day drop down and die, and they shall bury me, unknown, nameless ;—nothing to them, or to you, or to any one more. Will this do? Will this please you? Will this make amends? Will this be the best?”

She tried to take his hand, but he shrunk back from her. The action wounded her terribly, yet she bore up against it.

“And if I do all this—and I will, you may trust me—will you then forgive me?—will you then think kindly of me again, pityingly? Oh, if you *could* do this!—if you *could* try to think over again one of your old good thoughts in regard to me! You are going? I may not detain you? Adieu, Monsieur Wilford.”

She would not now be denied. She seized his hand, and pressed it passionately to her fevered lips. Another moment and he was gone. The door closed—she shivered as she heard it shut.

“I shall never see him more—never, never!” She abandoned herself to a paroxysm of grief; the tears streamed from her eyes; she sobbed violently. “I shall never see him more—never, never! and—and I love him!”

She hid her face in her hands.

For some time she remained so, bowed down by her sorrow. Suddenly a slight noise startled her. She looked up: Monsieur Alexis was leaning in the doorway watching her, a malicious grin upon his face.

“You are *très malade*, this time, are

you not, Mademoiselle Regine? You must be near your end, I should think. I never saw you cry before. I've seen you pretend, often; but never real tears like these."

She started up.

"I *will* see her," she cried passionately; "I *must* see her—this woman whom he loves. Alexis, you have the address: tell it to me. What is the name of the street near Soho Square?"

"Why should I tell you? Of what advantage will it be to me?"

"Must I pay for this also?"

"Well. No. Perhaps not. This time we will exchange services. I will give you this address if——"

"If what?"

"If you will convey for me a letter to Mademoiselle Blondette at the theatre."

“What !” cried Regine, laughing, though the tears were still wet upon her cheeks. “You love Mademoiselle Blondette ?”

“It is true,” Alexis answered, pressing his dirty hand upon his heart, and turning up his green eyes with an air of spurious enthusiasm and romance, not possible to an Englishman.

“My poor Alexis ! There is a chance then, that at last you will receive your deserts. Truly, I must cease to punish you. You will hardly need more punishment than you will receive from Mademoiselle Blondette.”

“She is beautiful as an angel.”

“She is charming,—with the gas-light strong upon her. Her smile is delightful,—when her lips are fresh painted. My poor Alexis ! You are *épris* with a ghoul. Blondette will eat you up,

bones and all, and laugh the while, showing her sharp white teeth. She has no more heart nor feeling than a guillotine. Yes, she is pretty: bright red and white laid on thick. But to love her, imbecile! She is like a cheap *bon-bon*—there is as much poison as sugar about her. The coating is mere plaster of Paris; the almond inside is very bitter. You love her! little fool! love a snake!”

“You hate her because you are jealous of her, Regine,” said Alexis, sulkily. “Will you give her the letter?”

“Certainly. Give me the address.”

Alexis wrote two lines slowly on a scrap of paper and flung it to Regine.

“Behold the address,” he said. Regine read it carefully.

“If you have deceived me! You

are capable of it. I do not know the name of the street you have written here."

"Bah! I have not deceived you."

"We shall see. I go there at once. A *fiacre* will soon take me. I shall meet this Madame Violet." She continued half aloud, "I shall see this woman whom he loves so much, for whom he despises me. I hate her already."

She quitted the room. Alexis went through a course of derisive and defiant gestures. Certainly he was more French than English.

"Take care, Mademoiselle Regine, take care," he said, shaking threateningly a small, black, gristly fist. "You abuse Blondette, the woman whom I adore! You dare to trample on my heart! And, more; this five thousand

pounds which Madame Boisfleury claims, *you* presume to forgive! Is it so? It is *you* who are imbecile. There will be war between you then, about this poor Monsieur Wilford! Take care. What if I reveal to Madame that you have seen this person, what you have said to him? Aha! For me, I am on the side of five thousand pounds. But to succour the poor Père Dominique? *Pas si bête!* If he escape, he will only beat me again. No, to spend in this city!—to buy presents for Blondette! Five thousand pounds! How these dogs of English are rich!”

Soon Regine left Stow Street in a cab, to search for the house of one Mr. Phillimore in the neighbourhood of Soho.

Wilford had repaired to his Covent

Garden Hotel. He sat down in the empty coffee-room, resting his throbbing head upon his hands, looking very sad and worn, and dejected.

“What to do?” he murmured. “What to do? The time runs on. Violet must be written to. Already she must be expecting news of me. She will be growing uneasy—will think I am neglecting her. Heaven knows, I would sooner die than cause her unhappiness! But what to do?”

He strode up and down the room with an abstracted air. He paused suddenly before the glass over the fireplace, struck with his own wild, haggard looks. He tried to read the *Times*; but the print seemed to dance before him, it made him quite giddy, he could not keep his eyes fixed on it, and his thoughts were always away,

busy with the question, asked again and again, "What was he to do?" He sought amusement looking from the coffee-room window at the thousands passing to and fro, occupied in the market. He conned for the hundredth time the addresses of the faded letters in a sort of iron cage on the mantel-piece, sent to visitors who had long since quitted the hotel, and who would never return for their correspondence. He turned over the leaves of the Post Office Directory, not knowing what he was doing. Certainly looking for nothing. He stood for five minutes before the dark-coloured mahogany sideboard, staring vacantly at a cruet-stand, still asking himself "what he should do?"

"Why did they ever come back—these dreadful Pichots? Silent, gone

from the country, never to return—as good as dead—am I then secure? Who will ever know? Will not all then be well? May I not then return to her—to Violet—and forget, and be happy? Why not? What should hinder me?” He waited a long time. There was an expression of deep anguish in his face, as he said at last, “But my honour, my duty, are these to be forgotten wholly? God help me!” he cried fervently. “I have never been so tried before!” and he hid his face.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## IS THEATRICAL.

THE manager of the Theatre Royal, Long Acre, was not a very nice man. He had followed a good many other professions before he took to trading in theatrical entertainments. If moss be not gathered by the rolling stone, certainly a good deal of dirt adheres to it in the course of its revolutions. A man who has been through several businesses must have something of a

soil from each left on his fingers; and if he did not primarily start with very clean hands, of course the result at the end is all the more grimy in effect. Labour-stains are very honourable if the labour has been sufficiently honest. But we have no occasion, as we have no temptation, to dig down to the roots of the career of Mr. Grimshaw, the lessee and manager of the Theatre Royal, Long Acre. All diggers do not meet with ore. Some often turn up less agreeable matters in the course of their toils. Let us accept, as the public did, Mr. Grimshaw as a blown manager, and not trouble ourselves about his bud period. Who cares to ponder over ugly chrysalis antecedents when the butterfly is fluttering about in full magnificence?

He was quite the man to succeed as

a manager. In the first place, he wasn't an actor, and had never dreamt, amidst all his changes of life, of becoming one: he was wary enough to know what not to do or to be. He did not take the theatre to assume the important parts that no one else would allot to him; to wake the dreary echoes of the empty house by his own dismal performance of *Macbeth*. He did not propose to start as an eminent tragedian on his own account, to end on some one else's a hopeless insolvent, proffering a fearful schedule to a wrathful commissioner. He took the Long Acre (it had been long empty; he got it cheap) to fill his pocket rather than indulge his vanity. The Town said he was enterprising. He was in a condition which compels people to be enterprising: he could not suffer by

speculation. He was without money, without character, without even credit, which sometimes survives the absence of the others. How could he lose? What could he lose? On the contrary, he seemed to be in such a situation that he *must* win; because any change must be for the better. He opened the theatre. He pawned his watch and sold his great coat (the warm weather was coming on, so he did not feel the loss much) to pay for his placards. He was manager of the T. R., Long Acre! To his own surprise and everybody's besides, he found money enough in the treasury on Saturday night to pay his way. The Town lauded him extravagantly: he was the only man who had made the theatre remunerative! On the strength of this applause he was able to borrow money at a

rate not much exceeding sixty per cent.—of course taking part of the advance in cases of champagne. Certainly he was clever. He made even the wine available! He gave a grand supper to his *employés*. The thing was well noticed by the press, and advanced the theatre wonderfully. All that is ever wanted, it seems, in such matters, is reputation for success. Of course, a manager that gives champagne to his supernumeraries must be successful, and the theatre was crowded nightly. It was admitted that a low comedian, criticizing the liquor, had declared a decided preference for “shandygaff;” but he was voted coarse, and put down. Altogether, the corps suffered much less than might have been expected. There was no coroner’s inquest. Some actors’ stomachs must be as strong as their lungs.

“The secret of my success as a manager,” said Grimshaw once in a confidential moment, and when perhaps his habitual caution had been carried away by a tide of hot gin-and-water, then running very high indeed, “the secret of my success as a manager lies in the *billing*. People say it’s novelty; but it isn’t. I like novelty, of course, when I can get it, but I can’t always; and the fact is, that, with proper *billing*, you may make an old thing look like a new one. You may make almost anything pass for a novelty. I’m very particular about my *billing*. I ride through the town once a week regularly to take stock of my playbills. I keep my eye on the shops that put ’em boldly out at the front, so that they *must* strike the passer-by. I defy him to avoid them. And I note those

as smuggle 'em up in the back shop, or perhaps use them to wrap up parcels, or what not. I've known it done. And I look how the placards are wearing, and try to find new *pitches* for them; and I try to invent a new system of advertising. That's the thing with the public; keep it up, stick to them, bully them: they'll defy you at first, chaff you, swear at you perhaps; but in the end you'll find them all taking dress-circle tickets for themselves and every member of their families, and the house crammed to suffocation every night, and a mere stock piece playing after all, perhaps. And if you can do this with an old thing, what can't you do with a new one?"

It has been said that he was not a very nice man. He did not take

the T. R., Long Acre, because he had any regard for the drama, or because he respected anything or anybody. There was no purpose in his management beyond his own advantage.

"It don't matter to me, you know, a morsel, what's played," he said, as he drained his sixth tumbler, nearly swallowing a slab of lemon that had whilom been floating in the liquor, but was now quite stranded or knocking about in the glass in a dry, useless way. "I'll put up anything they'll come and see. Is it Billy Shakspeare you want?—you shall have him, hot and strong, and plenty of him,—only pay your money at the door fust, please. Or will you have hopera? All right. I'll give you the best of singing birds, or bally, or 'orses, or the hacrobats, or the helephants,—any-

think you like, it don't matter to me, blesh you, only say the word. Glasses round again, gentlemen; or, what do you say, will you have a bottle of *sham?*" &c., &c.

Certainly, it was all the same to Mr. Grimshaw what he "put up," as he phrased it, and he would have played Shakspeare as soon as anything else, if he had thought he could have made it pay, and sooner, if he could have made a "novelty," or got a "sensation" out of it (the word wasn't in use then; but never mind, it fits just as well the circumstances which I am narrating). Above all, if he could have engaged a trained gorilla, and been able to cast him for the part of *Romeo!* He *had* made a great hit with an accomplished troupe of dogs and monkeys; a poodle who danced a

naval hornpipe in appropriate costume, having by his cleverness held London enthralled for months. But a trained gorilla as *Romeo*! What houses! What a *draw*, if the thing was only tolerably billed!

He was always looking out for novelty of whatever kind. He was always attentive to what was passing on other stages, at home and abroad,—he was not above borrowing the ideas of his neighbours when there was occasion. Business was beginning to flag a little. The public was certainly hard to please. The performing wild beasts were exceedingly clever; they had eaten a stage carpenter entirely, and enjoyed several mouthfuls of a call-boy,—and yet the houses were not nearly so good as might have been expected. He heard on several sides that a new

dancer — Mademoiselle Stephanie Boisleury—was exciting attention—"creating a *furore*" was the exact expression—at Berlin, Vienna, Brussels, Milan, &c.

"I might do worse than engage her, you know," said Grimshaw; "they tell me, you know, she's a good-looking woman, and a very plucky dancer. There hasn't been a regular right-down good *bally* in London for some years. I wonder whether she'd come—cheap?"

In a few days a very elaborate system of *billing* commenced. An envelope, that appeared to contain a telegraphic message was left by a boy in a uniform, at the door of every private house in the Court Guide; and the nobility, gentry, and public were respectfully informed that the Lessee and Manager of the T. R., Long Acre, had secured at an enormous outlay, exclusively for

that grand and national establishment, the services of the renowned Mademoiselle STEPHANIE BOISFLEURY, *première danseuse* of the San Carlo, at Naples, La Scala, Milan, and all the chief cities of Europe: whose extraordinary talents had been the theme of admiration of the entire continental press for a very considerable time past. Her first appearance, it was stated, would take place almost immediately, in the new, grand, romantic ballet, in six tableaux, "L'AEROLITHE; ou, La Fille du Firmament:" music by Signor Strepito,—with entirely new scenery, dresses, and appointments, upon which the whole strength of the establishment had been employed for many months past. Mademoiselle Stephanie Boisleury would be supported by Mesdames Celine, Julie, Blondette, Brown, Estelle, O'Callaghan,

Schmidt, &c., MM. Anatole, Renaud, Pierre, W. H. Sims, Raphael, and McNish, and one hundred coryphées. Immediate application was to be made for seats. The box-office was open daily from ten to five, under the direction of Mr. Clark, &c., &c.

Mr. Grimshaw had managed very adroitly with Mademoiselle Boisfleury and her friends. The "enormous outlay" was of course supposititious. He found the lady anxious, for various reasons, to visit London. He immediately reduced his proposals to a minimum. In fact he did not care about the thing at all, he said; he had made other arrangements; he had so many other matters pending. But if she liked to come to Long Acre, and dance for a week for nothing, he would engage her for two months

afterwards, at a salary of fifteen pounds a week, with liberty to him to terminate the engagement at a week's notice. He added that he would "mount" the ballet for her, first-rate, and would throw in the clear half of a ticket benefit. Upon these not high terms, the services of Mademoiselle Boisfleury were eventually secured for the great national establishment in Long Acre.

Mademoiselle Boisfleury was a signal success.

"We're pulling in the money now, sir, like bricks," Mr. Grimshaw informed his intimates, ordering glasses round after his manner. "We shall be able to run the bally right up to the pantomime, if we take care; and get through the year splendidly."

Indeed, out of the profit accruing from the engagement of Mademoiselle

Boisfleury, he was able to avert altogether a bankruptcy that had been long impending, to compound with his creditors, and to commune with himself whether the surplus was not sufficient to justify the carrying into execution of a scheme he had long been cherishing, for the leasing of two other theatres, and the purchase of three music-halls, a circus, five public-houses, and a chapel. It was the dream of Grimshaw to possess all these properties; the field for *billing* that then would be open to him seemed to him grand and glorious indeed.

“I should be able to turn round then; a fellow ain’t got elbow room at the Long Acre. It’s as easy to manage four theatres as one. If you know how to drive, a four-in-hand isn’t harder, while it’s much pleasanter, than

one 'orse—isn't it, old fellow, you know about 'orses? Will you have a private box for the missus, for Toos-day? I'd give any money if I could get respectable people into my private boxes. However, we can't have everything—at the pit we turn away money every night."

I have always admired very much the first, second, and third gentleman whom Shakspeare has now and then brought upon his scene; who are so bland, and amiable, and courteous, and convey so much information to each other and the audience; particularly the audience. What very agreeable background figures are these gentlemen, filling up chinks and crannies in the narrative; keeping out the draught, as it were, and yet, like the gilded leather we nail round the doors to make our

rooms snug and comfortable in the winter time, useful the while they are ornamental. In a court of justice how important are those scraps of evidence which seem so trivial in themselves, and yet which form the links binding the big manacles together very tightly round the prisoner's wrists. I should like to summon indifferent but respectable witnesses to give the kind of "putty" evidence that fills up the chinks of the history. But I know that I cannot expect "first, second, and third gentlemen" to perform such an office for me, so far as this portion of my narrative is concerned. Of course, *Nec deus intersit*, &c. All know the line, if only from meeting with it so constantly in newspaper articles. It is very well for the first, second, and third gentlemen to give information touch-

ing the execution of a Duke of Buckingham, or the coronation of a Lady Anne, but may we question them concerning the performances of a Mademoiselle Boisfleury at the T. R., Long Acre, under the management of Mr. Grimshaw? Fie! It is true they may discuss such matters; but they would do so in their private apartments, or in the smoking-room of their club; we are not members probably, and may not listen and report, even if we are. But they would not talk over Mademoiselle Stephanie for half an hour in the public streets. Yet there are some people who do this kind of thing, and so will serve our turn as well. They form almost a class, yet they have no distinctive title. The word "gent" was at one time suggested as applicable to an individual of this class; and he has

been termed a "snob;" but the latter was found to be of so elastic a significance that it could be stretched to comprehend the whole universe almost. The former was preferable principally on the ground of its being a diminutive; to designate something considerably less than a gentleman, the word *gent* has certainly its recommendations. But we have a want of something like the Italian method of arriving at a diminutive. Taking "swell" as a starting point, therefore, we desire to reach some such word as *swellino*, or *swelletto*, to signify a cheap or little swell. There is somehow a sense of endearment, almost of a nursery character, implied in such a termination as we find in the word *swellikin*, which at once renders it unfit for our purpose. Perhaps we

might follow the system of musical nomenclature ; and as quaver is diminished into semi-quaver and demi-semi-quaver, we might reduce the power of the word swell by making it occasionally, semi-swell and demi-semi-swell. Any one who, by his cheapness and littleness is stayed from rising even to this last humble level, must, I think, regard himself as too far removed from the original distinction to have any, the remotest title to it whatever.

It is not necessary for me to describe the semi, and the demi-semi, swell. Many specimens of the genera are about. Let it be said that they are generally young in years, and—to their credit—clean in person. But their taste in dress, in cigars, in language, is not to be commended. They may be useful fellow-citizens between ten and

four; behaving tolerably, writing good hands, altogether doubtless of some value to their employers. They are not of the old race of clerks, who worked very hard, and took snuff, and wore shabby dress-coats, and passed the greater part of their lives on the tops of very high stools. They are born probably of the modern system of commerce—shifting responsibility—public companies—limited liability, &c. I don't desire to be caustic in reference to these compatriots of mine. As Folly occasionally flies my way, I may try to have a flick at her with a light whip, without strong feeling or a very muscular arm. I disclaim the task of those determined satirists who are ever going about with pickled rods, and like the old woman in the shoe story, whipping all their subjects soundly and sending them to bed. Still I desiderate

improvement in the taste, and amelioration in the *morale*, of the small swell. Perhaps, too, he *does* go a little too often half-price to the pit of the T. R., Long Acre.

Two demi-semi-swells discuss the merits of Mademoiselle Boisfleury.

"Hullo, Charley—seen the new woman at Long Acre?"

"Rather. I should think so. Saw her the first night."

"Good?"

"Well, she ain't bad."

"Pretty?"

"Yes, she's pretty; but she ain't young." (This, I find, is a very ordinary observation to make in reference to women. It's very easy, and it looks like information. A man has often got a reputation for knowingness by no more difficult means. Disparagement

indeed, as a rule, is not difficult. Of course the person disparaging mounts at once to a platform very superior to that enjoyed by the person disparaged. What could Charley know about the age of Mademoiselle de Boisfleury? He sat at the back of the pit, without an opera-glass; and the Long Acre pit is not a small one, as everybody knows.)

"The *bally* good? What does she do?"

"Stunning. Swings in the air with the electric light on her. Screaming effect."

"What *is* an Aërolite? Sort of thunderbolt, ain't it?"

"Something of that sort, I believe."

"It's worth going to see, then?"

"Oh, certainly. She's an out-and-out

dancer—comes right away down from the back of the stage to the footlights on the points of her toes—first-rate.”

“Good scenery by Blister?”

“Tol-lol. Part of what they had in the pantomime last year—only one new scene.”

“Come and have some beer,” &c., &c. (Demi-semi-swells enter public-house.)

The town was certainly well *billed*. In all directions the eye met placards setting forth in colossal capitals (scarlet on a saffron ground,) the talent of Mademoiselle Stephanie Boisfleury.

A well-dressed person, wearing gold spectacles, was reading one of these bills very attentively. He did not perceive that he had thus become in his turn an object of attention. A stout man, buttoned up to the throat in a long

brown overcoat, was watching the reader smilingly.

“Hullo, Mossoo,” cried the stout man at last.

The reader started back, looking round him eagerly. The reader was Monsieur Chose.

“Thinking of going to the play?” the stout man continued. “Why, who’d have thought of seeing you here, Mossoo——”

“Hush! don’t mention names, my friend, it is better not. Ah! *cher* Inspector, it is long since we have met!”

“I was with you in the case of that banker, you know. He came over here to take ship from Liverpool.”

“Yes, I remember! What a fool he was! But the criminal is always fool—is he not, *cher* Inspector? He goes

on rob, rob, for years and years, and yet never arranges a plan for his safety and escape. How that is imprudent! How different *we* should manage! Yes, I remember. We caught the little runaway banker, thanks to you. It was well done. I did not know this country so well then as now I know it. We were much obliged to you."

The Inspector, as Monsieur Chose called him, was a very broad-shouldered, good-tempered looking Englishman, with bright hazel eyes and a very massive jaw. He was close shaven, with the exception of a little triangular tuft of hair, red-brown in hue, left standing on the summit of either cheek—probably as a sort of sample of the whiskers he was capable of producing, should they ever be required of him;

just as a tailor shows a scrap of cloth, a specimen of the much larger piece he can exhibit when called upon. He had a hearty, pleasant manner with him, and a fragrance as of a combination of beer and snuff hung about him.

"Here on business?" asked the Inspector, in an off-hand way.

"No, not precisely," replied Monsieur Chose. "I may say that I came here on a little private matter; but, as I am here, I keep my eye on one or two people, just to amuse myself. You have many of our suspects, here, I notice."

The Inspector glanced for a moment curiously at his companion, as though he did not deem the remark wholly satisfactory. Then, after filling his blunt nose with as much snuff as it could

possibly contain, even with the most adroit packing, he remarked:

“If I can help you in any way, I shall be very happy, I’m sure.”

“*Mon ami*, you are most kind; I thank you.”

And Monsieur Chose removed his hat and bowed with singular grace and fervour to the Inspector, but did not seem disposed to be any further communicative.

“I’ve been down at Liverpool,” said the Inspector, perhaps by way of setting an example of confidence, “busy with a very nice little matter. But we can’t make much out of it at present. You see the conduct of the thing rests with a board of directors, and when that’s the case, there’s sure to be a mess. They never can make

up their minds what they'll do : whether they'll hush it up or expose it all, and take the chance of being damaged by it. Of course they lose all the best time. Then they go in suddenly, and when it's almost too late. They'll make an example, they declare; they'll pay anything rather than the cove should escape justice, — offering rewards and advertising, and having a heap of detectives round them, sitting at the board-room table, and drinking sherry with the chairman, and that sort of thing. That's just this case. I'm not regularly in it yet. I'm waiting for instructions. Meanwhile I'm keeping watch. I know where my party is; I know all about him, in fact, every hair of his head almost; and when the time comes, and he's wanted,

why, I'm all there, you know, and can put my hands upon him at a very short notice."

"A large amount?"

"Pretty tidy. Some twelve thousand or so. A common case; a gent in public company; awfully trusted and looked up to; board swearing by him, and that sort of thing. Suddenly some one lights upon a little scratching out in one of his books: and my gentleman bolts. The company is let in to the tune of twelve thousand, more or less, spread over a good many years."

"But the case is not difficult?"  
Monsieur Chose imagined.

"Oh, dear, no," the Inspector answered; "nothing of the kind—very simple — happens every day nearly. I know the sort of thing by

heart. It's only to get a few facts. What was the party's particular fancy? How did he spend his money? Was he Stock Exchangey? Did he speculate? No! Then his weakness was 'orses; or the *bally*; or else religious institutions. On those scents you *must* find him."

"And this one loves the *ballet*—is it not so?"

"Right you are, Mossoo," quoth the Inspector, laughing. "We shall find him at the Long Acre this evening, looking at the girl dancing. Are you going?"

"It is possible. But I have seen her before: at Vienna, Milan, Naples, wherever she has played, in fact."

"You like her, then, Mossoo?" and the Inspector laughed. He fan-

ced, perhaps, he had found a weak place in the armour of his French friend.

“ I think that Mademoiselle Boisleury is charming,” said Monsieur Chose, quite seriously.

The Inspector did not appear to be able to appreciate or comprehend abstract admiration.

“ Perhaps you think there is some danger in her grand scene,” he suggested. “ But, bless you, these things are safe enough—they are only made to look like danger; that’s all. I’ve been on a rope myself—I was thinner then, of course; and, with a pole in your hand, it’s no more than going across Oxford Street.”

“ The accident comes some day,” Monsieur Chose observed, philosophically, “ only one is never on the spot

to see it. Many years ago there was a man—not here, but abroad—an *artiste*, very clever ; he put his head into wild beast mouths, and so on. Well, I was young,—I was struck. I wanted to see the end. For two months I follow that man — let him go where he please. I was there to see him put his head into wild beast mouths. Nothing happen—he is secure—the band play the *preghiera* from *Moise*—the audience cry huzza !—and so on. One day I have my dinner—excellent dinner—and afterwards, (it was not in this country,) I had *demi-bouteille* of *Hochheimer*. I am fond of *Hochheimer*. Especially when I cannot have the wines of my country. I sit over my wine, like an English. Ah well ! meanwhile ” (Monsieur Chose joined his hands at the wrists, keeping

his palms as wide apart as possible) "the hair of the *artiste* had tickled the throat of the lion. He closed his mouth *so*" (Monsieur Chose brought his large white hands together with a loud clap). "It was all over. The *artiste* was dead. And I had not assisted at the representation! I had missed it by a *demi-bouteille* of *Hochheimer*."

"What a pity!" said the Inspector, sincerely, taking snuff.

"It is as I say, the accident happens, but one is not there to see. Tell me, if you please, Monsieur, who is that person? There—just passing us."

"The tall party—pale, with a black beard?"

"Yes, he lives in the *quartier* Soho."

"Don't know him; at least I don't

think I do," the Inspector added cautiously. "You see, beards make such a difference—it's all the harder lines for us. A man has but to shave clean, nowadays, and he looks like a new creature. For that party, he's an artist, perhaps, or a sculptor, might be,—looks uncommon like a sculptor,—or he *may* be literary; he *has* got a queer look about him: only I think I should have known him, certainly, if he'd been literary. He's not a reporter. I know all that lot."

Monsieur Chose mused for a few moments. Suddenly he said:

"Let us see together this Mademoiselle Boisfleury."

"With all my heart," cried the Inspector, stoutly; "I am on the free list; I've known Grimshaw for many a long day. *He's* a rum card, if you like."

“Let us dine,” cried Monsieur Chose, “let us drink many toasts and healths: is not that your English fashion? We are bound by many ties; we are both members of the executive of two very grand nations. We will drink to our success—to the prosperity of our two systems. It will be a grand fête of the *entente cordiale*—it will be superb!”

“I’m afraid our liquors ain’t the same,” said the Inspector, laughing.

“I will eat of your English biff-steck with the sauce of oysters. I will drink of your English haf-naf, or of the stout! *Mon ami, allons!* It will be a *réunion* full of charm, of grace, of spirit: and afterwards—the theatre!”

“Come along, then; I know a crib close at hand that will suit us—the very thing.”

“We will go to this—what you call—*creeb*, and after, the Theatre Long Acre!”

“Strange!” cried Wilford Hadfield, starting suddenly, as he hurried along; “am I mad? I am haunted with this idea! I see this name, *Boisfleury*, written everywhere—staring me in the face on all sides. Is my brain going?”

He stopped, turned, rubbed his eyes, then gazed steadfastly at a hoarding he was passing. He smiled almost in spite of himself as he discovered his error. It was no dream that was bewildering him. He had simply come upon a shoal of the *Boisfleury* placards. He went on his way.

How Grimshaw, had he been present and noticed this incident, would have

congratulated himself upon this triumphant manifestation of his admirable system of *billing*. The secret of his management and his success.

## CHAPTER IX.

## A REVELATION CONTINUED.

"COME in, my dear Wil, I've been longing to see you for these past two days. Why have you kept away? Lord, how your hand burns! Come in and sit down, and make yourself comfortable, and tell me presently what you have been doing with yourself."

And Martin, with kind force, drew Wilford into the Temple chambers, and made him sit down in the easiest chair.

“I will tell you, Martin, soon,” said Wilford; “indeed I have much to tell you.”

He was too much occupied to perceive that Martin was excited, even agitated—that he only restrained himself by a violent effort from permitting this to be unmistakeably evident.

“I have been suffering very much since we last met, Martin. I have been torturing myself with all sorts of doubts and alarms. I have been thinking until my mind has almost abandoned me. I have overtasked my brain until it seemed to be burning in my head like a live coal. But I have arrived at a determination at last; for indeed I can bear the present state of things no longer. I shall go mad if I do not speak to some one, and reveal the cause of my suffering. I come

down here to-day to complete what I left unfinished some days ago. Cost what it will, I must speak now. Give me your patience first. God knows whether, when you have heard me, I shall have a right to ask aught further of you. May I go on?"

Martin signified assent.

He bent his eyes on the ground; he concealed the lower half of his face, leaning his chin on his hand.

Wilford resumed.

"You remember the story I began to tell the other day?"

"I loved the girl Regine, or believed that I did. On the part of the Pichots, no arts were wanting to encourage that belief. I shudder as I think of the shameful avidity with which I accepted the coarse adulation of these creatures. My only excuse can be that

at the time I was a mere boy, badly brought up, nurtured in the idea of a false superiority over others; the heir to an old name and a great estate, easily betrayed by the cunning of this man and woman into the opinion that I had a claim to the love of Regine that could not be gainsaid. My admiration excited, they hastened to inflame my vanity, and to play upon these until my boyish sentiments were wrought to the idea that I loved the girl Regine passionately, and that I had but to declare myself to discover that my love was returned. In a moment of insane recklessness I avowed to Regine my feeling for her. She treated my suit with scorn the most complete. But my vanity and my passion were not quenched by this unlooked-for coldness; they seemed but to burn the

more intensely. I was not cured of my folly. I grew mad with rage. I swore that I would make her mine. I revealed to the Pichots what had passed, imploring their aid. It was rendered in hot haste. The influence they possessed over Regine, when once they chose to exert it, was extraordinary. By what means they ruled her so absolutely I shall never know. Previously they had been content with attempts to persuade her—to dazzle her with the idea of my wealth and importance, by appealing to her pride, and by placing my admiration for her in the strongest light possible. Now this was changed. They had an angry, virulent conference with her. Shortly afterwards, Madame Pichot bade me seek Regine again, and renew my suit. I did so. I found her sullen, silent,

indifferent. I went over again the story of my love for her. When she quitted me I was her accepted suitor. Let me say at once that no dishonourable condition was contained in my suit. My passion was fierce, violent: but it had all the honesty, the unselfishness, that a boy's passion ever has. To the woman that I believed I loved, I offered marriage. It is only maturer life that is bold enough and bad enough to proffer, in one breath, both love and insult.

“One word as to the object of the Pichots. It was plainly this, — my uncle's money; to be secured through their daughter, and the power they would through her obtain, and continue to hold over me. They had made more than one attempt already to induce my uncle to execute a will by which they

should benefit; but this he had continually deferred doing. Failing a will, his fortune would go to my father, as the nearest relative, and, of course, through him, would descend in great part to me, as his eldest son. In this case the Pichots perceived their advantage; and especially if I married their putative daughter. If my uncle made a will, why of course their chances of profit were very good—they might benefit under it directly as legatees; or their daughter might; or if I was made sole heir—as was possible—then, again, they had claims as the parents of my wife, supposing the projected marriage to be carried into effect. It may be as well to state here what was the ultimate disposition of my uncle's property. His will was made, it appeared afterwards, while he was at Grilling Abbots shortly

before his death. He had been an invalid for some time, and the Pichots had been in constant attendance upon him. He was not himself; he had been, it seemed to every one, imbecile for some months preceding his death, incapable of making a valid will. Still, after his funeral, the will was produced—a common printed form, filled up by Madame Pichot, but signed, apparently, by my uncle, and witnessed by two of the servants at the Grange. By this will he bequeathed the whole of his property, of whatever description, to the separate use of Madame Pichot. It was said that a sealed letter to her address was folded up with the will, and that this letter contained a request that she would consider the bequest as upon trust for the benefit of a natural child of the testator. I know not on

what foundation this rumour rested. My father, I know, was urged to contest the will on the ground of the insanity of his brother, and his incapacity to make a valid disposition of his property. But he steadily declined. Whether he ever saw the letter to Madame Pichot, whether he ever suspected that a natural daughter of the Colonel's existed, I know not. 'He was my brother,' he said rather angrily; 'his money was his own, earned by himself; he did not inherit it, it did not spring from the family property—the Hadfield lands; he had a right to do what he liked with it—to fling it into the dirt if he thought fit—he has chosen to give it all to his servants. Perhaps I don't think so highly of them as he did, but that makes no difference. Sane or insane,

the terms of his will shall be carried out to the letter. I'll have no lawyers feasting on my poor brother's property, like so many crows on carrion. I'll not have the newspaper people printing the history of an old family, and the private life of a noble soldier and worthy gentleman, for fools to grin over at breakfast time. These Pichots shall have the money, and much good may it do them. Let them go and spend it as quick as they like; only let the infernal mulatto and his wife take their ugly faces out of the Grange, and away from Grilling Abbots—it makes me sick to look at them.' Madame Pichot was put into possession of my late uncle's property, and, with her husband Dominique, quitted the Grange.

“Let me come at once to the most sad—the most shameful part of this history.”

He stopped, trembling all over. Then in a faint, faltering voice—his breathing very quick, and his heart beating with a painful violence—he said:

“Time went on: and I—MARRIED THE GIRL—REGINE STEPHANIE PICHOT!”

“*Married her?*” cried Martin, starting up.

“Bear with me!” and Wilford held out his hands imploringly. “Think, if this is dreadful for you to hear, how dreadful it must be for me to tell! I married her. The utmost secrecy was observed. The Pichots were the only witnesses. The ceremony was performed at Calais. Years ago there was an English clergyman residing there, prevented by his debts and his dissolute habits from returning to England. This man—half intoxicated—officiated: in a crumpled, dingy surplice, his voice

thick, his hands shaking, his eyes blood-shot, he invoked the blessing of Heaven upon a union which made this Regine Stephanie Pichot my wife!"

"And this marriage is valid?"

"Unquestionably. It is not possible to doubt it."

"And this Regine is—*dead*?"

"No, she still lives."

Martin turned very pale. In strange, constrained tones, he said slowly:

"Then Violet Fuller is not your wife?"

He read an answer in the expression of wild despair he found on Wilford's wan face.

"Oh! God!" cried Martin, with a great emotion, "but this is very awful."

Then he turned to Wilford almost savagely.

"How could you commit this dreadful sin?"

Wilford cowered down, covering his face.

There was a dead silence for several minutes.

"Spare me, Martin," he said at length, in a feeble voice, "do not judge me yet. There is more to be told. Perhaps there is some extenuation for my sin. Let me go on."

"Go on," said Martin, coldly.

"I will be as brief as possible. This marriage, completed under such auspices, arranged so strangely—the wife sullenly consenting, without even the affectation of feeling, to marry the wretched boy who wooed her,—this marriage was not likely to result in much happiness. There *was* no happiness—there was no semblance of it

even. Regine never loved me; never even pretended to love me. My vanity was hurt—my pride was deeply outraged; yet I consoled myself with the thought that time would work a change, and that as I did all that man could do to make her happy, so in the end she would appreciate my endeavours, and give me her affection. I bore with her angry silence, her repulse of my love, her apathy, her strange coldness, sustained by this hope. You know that I quarrelled with my father?"

"I have heard so—I know no particulars," said Martin, gloomily.

"My marriage was clandestine, as you have heard. It was known but to the Pichots, and the clergyman who performed the ceremony; to not one other living soul. From my father,

and the other members of my family it was, of course, kept a profound secret. But he began to suspect my frequent absence from the Grange. He obtained some clue, how I know not, to the circumstances of my life in London. He tasked me finally with maintaining a degrading connection. He lost all command over his temper. He was carried by his rage beyond all bounds. He heaped insults upon the woman who was my wife, though he did not know it. He called her shameful names. It was more than I could bear. Then, in a paroxysm of passion, he struck me. I did not return the blow. But he sought to seize me by the throat; to avoid this, I thrust him from me—with some violence, it may be—and endeavoured to escape from the room. His foot caught in the hearthrug, he

stumbled and fell heavily ; his head struck against the fender, and the wound so inflicted bled profusely. I was driven from the Grange : to return after an absence of seven years, to be cursed anew—to see my father die—and learn that I was still unpardoned, cast off—disinherited.

“ And for what—for whom had been our dreadful quarrel ? For Regine—my wife ! My wife ! ” (he laughed with a wild scorn.) “ I quitted the Grange to discover that Regine was false to me—had long been carrying on a correspondence with another. The reason of her coldness was made apparent. I found letters, not of recent date, the terms of which admitted of no doubt. Her conduct had been shameful. She fled. The discovery tore the veil from my eyes. My love sank down dead : it was mastered by

my rage, my contempt, my despair. I let her go. The Pichots came to me. They asked me to provide lest their daughter should come to want; the while they professed to condemn her conduct in the strongest terms. I gave them nearly all the money I possessed to be silent, and to keep out of my sight. Judge that I made some sacrifices to effect this object, to bind these people to secrecy, though they were ever renewing their claims upon me. When I received intelligence of my father's serious illness, I was living in a garret at Brussels, trying to earn a living by teaching languages. It was only by selling all I had that I was enabled to provide means for my journey to Grilling Abbots."

"And Regine?" Martin asked.

"For more than seven years I had

heard nothing of her. Pray believe me, Martin, when I tell you that when I married Violet Fuller I felt assured that Regine had long been dead. I had made great efforts to trace her. I forbear to relate to you all I learnt concerning her. Finally I found she had been a prisoner in St. Lazare, condemned with two others for a conspiracy to defraud. Further inquiry ceased: for I was told at St. Lazare that she had died in prison, quite suddenly, some months before her term of punishment had expired."

"And you believed this?"

"I did, Martin. I swear to you that I did. Heaven knows I would not knowingly have brought this great sin upon my head. I would not willingly have wrought this cruel wrong to Violet. I may no more call her wife!"

"If this be so——"

"Indeed, indeed it is—on my soul it is!"

"Perhaps there is excuse for you, my poor friend!"

"You don't know how precious to me are those words, Martin."

"And Violet Fuller has known nothing of this early love—this fatal marriage?"

"Nothing. Not one syllable. Could I pollute her ears with a narrative of all the folly, the shame, the sin of those years of my life which I believed hidden for ever, and past all human finding out? Could I depreciate the love which seemed of value in her eyes, by telling her how of old it had been profligately lavished upon this woman—this—Regine. Let me remember that she is still lawfully my wife, when I

prepare to heap abuse upon her head."

"And you are *certain* that she still lives."

"*Certain*. I have *seen* her within these few hours—*spoken* with her. She is now here, in London with the woman Pichot and her son. It was he who left the letter here the other day. The father, Dominique Pichot, it seems, is a convict at the galleys. There is no doubt, Martin. All is too dreadfully, too certainly true. She lives—under an assumed name. Why should I hide anything from you?" (He took a paper from his pocket; it had been given him by Madame Boisfleury). "Learn all. Read this play-bill. The Mademoiselle Stephanie Boisfleury who dances at the theatre in Long Acre, is Regine Stephanie Pichot—the wife of Wilford Hadfield."

There was silence for some minutes. At length Martin spoke, but with evident effort. It was then only in reference to a question of detail. Men will often in such cases select to discuss what is apparently but a small part of a subject, either to gain time to form a conclusion upon the whole, or to shrink altogether from pronouncing a judgment.

“And the name of this clergyman at Calais?” he asked.

“I can tell you if you wish it, Martin; if you think it of importance.”

“Certainly. If this man was not really in orders, had been unfrocked, or suspended by his bishop—if he could not legally perform the ceremony, might not the marriage be invalidated?”

Wilford shook his head mournfully. He appeared to derive but little hope

from this suggestion, but he gave the required information. Martin, with a trembling hand, made a note in his pocket-book.

“I will make it my business to inquire into this. In such a case, it is necessary to avail ourselves of every, even the slightest chance. Still, Wilford, I should do wrong to hold out to you any serious encouragement. I confess——”

“I know what you would say, Martin. I believe beforehand that there is no hope. That I am fast bound, hand and foot, by this first early marriage. How can I hope to evade the consequences of the shame of my youth? Is it given to any one to sin with impunity? Is not wickedness ever its own Nemesis? I must bare my back to the lash—I must submit, though Heaven knows

my punishment is severe! The madman I have been! Why did I not bear my dishonour and suffering, as I had planned, away from the world, caring for and cared for by none. However deep my disgrace, it would have been then solely my own: it could not have tainted others, it could not have been shared by one whom I love a thousand times dearer than life. Violet! how can I expiate this sin against you, how can I hope to be forgiven the wrong I have inflicted upon you—yes—and upon our child? To dream that I could come from a pest-house and not bring infection with me; that I could mingle with the good and pure, and yet not soil and corrupt their goodness and purity! I should have shrunk from Violet, hurried from her sweet presence as an evil creature from an

angel of light! But I saw her. I listened to her. I could not but love her. I tried, as it were, to cheat my way back to heaven! I loved her. I asked her to be mine. And I have brought this cruel ruin upon her!"

He had spoken these words in a delirium of emotion. Now his voice trembled and broke, and the tears stood in his parched-looking eyes. Very pale, and with compressed lips, Martin turned away to the window.

"Think, Martin," said Wilford, after a pause, and in a calmer tone; "it was hard to act rightly—very hard for me—broken, and penitent, and hopeless. I knew that she loved me! She has paid dearly for her madness. But could I turn from that love?"

"You knew that she loved you, Wilford?"

"I knew it. I could not shut my eyes or my ears to that knowledge. It lifted me out of my unworthiness. Think how happy a future it opened to me—Violet's love!"

"It is all very sad, very dreadful," and Martin's voice trembled as he spoke. "As I have said, Wilford, there are excuses to be made for you. It would indeed be hard to turn away from the love of Violet Fuller." He stopped for a moment. "I know few men who, placed in your situation, would have forborne to act as you have acted. Can I say more? Forgive me, Wilford, if my conduct has seemed to you wanting in friendship, needlessly harsh and cold—if I have appeared to shrink from your history, to withhold from you the support you had a right to look for at my hands. It

is difficult to hold one's feelings always well in check. Who am I that I should condemn you? On what pinnacle of goodness do I stand, that I should look down frowningly upon your failings? If my sympathy, my pity, my friendship are of avail to you, be assured that they are yours, now and always. There is a lesson for all in the errors of one. It is easy to judge severely; it is, as I have said, hard—very hard—always to act rightly."

Wilford wrung his friend's hand warmly.

"And for the future, Martin, what am I to do?"

"What *can* you do, Wilford? The past cannot be recalled: yet it may be atoned for."

"Atoned for!" Wilford repeated, very mournfully. "What atonement can I offer?"

“By the side of a great wrong all possible expiation seems very little indeed. Stay, tell me: when did you learn that your first wife—I must call her so—was still living?”

“Do you remember, a few days back, my coming here with you, after dining at home?” He shuddered, the word seemed now so painful, so full of sorrow to him. “I left suddenly, shortly afterwards. You thought me ill. I had just been reading a letter taken by chance from my pocket to light a cigar with.”

“I remember it all, of course, perfectly.”

“That letter was from Madame Pichot. In it she demanded an interview. She informed me that my wife, Regine, was living—was in London—with the writer of the letter, in Stowe Street, Strand.

You may judge that I was startled, terrified by that letter, as though a bolt from Heaven had fallen at my feet."

"What did you do?"

"I was strangely bewildered. I tried to doubt the information conveyed by the letter; but I could not. Assurances of its truth seemed to be again and again rung loudly in my ear. I returned home. Yet I felt that, Regine still living, I was guilty of a crime if I remained in the presence of Violet, assuming to be her husband. I made excuses; pretended that I had undertaken a mission to Paris which would keep me from her for some days. I left her that night entirely unsuspecting of the real cause of my absence. I have not seen her since. I have been living since at an hotel in Covent

Garden, exploring this dreadful secret. Now, all hope is over. I have seen Regine. Violet is no longer my wife. Heaven pity her!"

"You have not seen Violet since?" Martin asked eagerly.

"No. I have not dared to meet her," Wilford answered with anguish. "I could not see her. I could not even write to her."

Martin watched him for a few moments.

"No," he muttered. "I cannot tell him. I must not. It would be more than he could bear."

"For the future——?" he asked.

"Tell me, Martin," cried Wilford, pitcously. "What must I do?"

"I know what your thought has been, my poor friend; a natural one perhaps, a human one certainly; to

be secure for the present at all cost ; to conceal and tide over, if possible ; to yield to the demands made upon you ; to buy the silence of these Pichots, and the absence of your first wife, at any sacrifice. Upon these terms you think you can be sure of happiness now, and are content to take your chance as to that happiness being again disturbed by-and-by."

"I have thought this," said Wilford, humbly.

Martin, with evident effort, continued.

"It is not for me to censure such views. There are many men who would be found to endorse such a plan with their approval, as, under all circumstances, the wisest, the safest, the most fitting, the most likely to secure the peace of mind of Violet and your-

self, and the future of your child. The secret is known to very few; death may at any time diminish their number; may remove the whole cause of your unhappiness. Regine dead, the claims of her relatives upon you become of small consideration. The secret may never be known; there are many secrets that are never known, that, humanly speaking, never can be known. It is for you to decide."

"Yet there would be no real happiness in this," cried Wilford. "Could I bear such a weight of wrong-doing? Could I support by Violet's side a life that would be a perpetual lie—a ceaseless dread?"

"It is in trials like this," said Martin, solemnly, "we feel the need of support from Heaven! How to act rightly? It is the problem of our lives. I am but

a blind guide, Wilford. Yet it seems to me your first impulse was the true one; to spring from one of those innate perceptions which God has planted in our souls, teaching us to distinguish the good and true. There has been wrong done enough, but it has the palliation that it was unconscious wrong. Violet is not your wife. You are guilty of a deliberate crime, if you now try to trick her into the belief that she is so; if you ask her any more to regard you as her husband. Let the truth be told: there will be sorrow, but there will be no sin; there will be cause for her anger—none for her contempt. You are a gentleman—a Hadfield. Be just and fear not. You will part from her for ever. You will have wronged her cruelly, but she is a

woman—she loves you—she will pardon you.”

“It will kill her!”

“But she will die with a prayer for you upon her lips.”

“And our child?”

“It is hers; do not think to part her from it. She will love you ever through her child. If she sinks down under this great trial, she will bequeath to you the care of her child—a sacred trust—which you will, I am sure, Wilford, respect as it merits. For the rest, you must trust in Heaven. You will have made all the atonement that is possible.”

“I will do this: for it is right. God bless you, Martin; thank you for your good counsel. I have been groping my way to the light; your kind hand has led me into the true path. All shall be as you say.”

"But do nothing rashly. Wait yet, until every doubt is cleared up. Do not see Violet yet; promise me this."

"I promise, Martin."

"Have I done rightly?" Martin asked himself, as he stood once more alone, very pale, and with a strange light in his eyes. "Has there been any false leaven in my counsel? Has this love in my heart betrayed me—turned me false to him? Has any dream,—any insane jealous fancy—prompted me to part this man and wife? Have I built any shameful hope upon that separation? Heaven forgive me if this has been so! Let me think—think!" He sank into a chair. For some moments he remained lost in thought. Then he went on: "No. I cannot be guilty of this systematic villainy. It must be right that they

should part. I am brought no nearer to her; it may be that I shall never see her again. Perhaps it will be better so. No. I could not wrong my friend, or her, by counselling a course which severs them from happiness for ever, which will bring upon her a grief almost more than she can bear. Poor Violet! My love is hopeless now as it has ever been. I do not profit by this sorrow. We must be just before all things: yet I would die willingly to spare her the pain of this disclosure. To know that she is not Wilford's wife—that another has a better claim to that title—and that the child, of whom she is so proud, upon whom she lavishes all a mother's rapture and fondness, that child is——! It is too dreadful! Her quiet, peaceful home wrecked for ever! It will kill her!"

He started up.

“What am I thinking about? She may know all this already! What was it that man, Phillimore, told me in Freer Street last night? *That she had gone!* His Madonna, as he called her. Can she have known, suspected anything of Wilford’s story? I dared not speak to him of this; it was more than he could bear. If he goes to Freer Street to find that Violet has already left him! I must see to this. Yet there are other things to look to.” (He opened his pocket-book.) “This clergyman, too, must be sought out. How? What if the marriage should be invalid? But even if this man had been suspended, would that fact necessarily invalidate any marriage he might solemnize? It is a question of ecclesiastical law, I suppose. How rusty

one's learning grows on these subjects! Yet the chance—every chance—must be seen to. I suppose the thing is provided for in the Church Discipline Act, though I'm sure I don't recollect its provisions. If necessary, I must consult my friend Jordan, the solicitor."

Then his eye fell on the playbill. He began reading it aloud.

"Mademoiselle Stephanie Boisfleury, *première danseuse*, &c. &c."

With a care that was half unconscious he went through the programme of the entertainment at the Theatre Royal, Long Acre, from the first line to the last.

"I have a great curiosity to see this woman," he said, musingly.

## CHAPTER X.

## VIOLET AND REGINE.

MEANWHILE in Freer Street, Soho, Violet had been watching anxiously for letters announcing the safe arrival in Paris of her husband. She had never doubted him before—could she doubt him now? Could she dream, for one moment, that he was still in London—but a mile from her, and yet not speeding to press her to his heart.

But why did he not write to her?

He must know that she would be longing to hear from him. How thoughtless of him not to write! Why was she to be sacrificed to business considerations. What were influential journals and their Paris correspondence, to her and her love? It was unkind of him, most unkind. Yet,—no, no, let there be no blame of him, now that he was absent. No harsh thought of him now that he was away from her—alone—sad and wretched as she was, perhaps. But that seemed barely possible. So the thoughts came and went, and returned, chasing each other, torturing, sickening her.

How her caresses and kisses were lavished on her child! quite a double allowance of them. Baby besides his own share, had papa's. Was ever baby made so much of—so

loved—before? It was not clear that he appreciated the matter. He was very good. Sleeping very much (rocked by the Rembrandt almost rude in her determination to share the nursery duties with mamma), very fat and rosy, and comfortable,—hardly crying at all, at least not to speak of,—Mr. Phillimore admitted that.

But still no letters! Surely many posts had passed. What could have hindered his writing?

If there should have been an accident! He would be obliged to go on railways and steamboats. Those dreadful railways! Those terrible steamboats! But Mr. Phillimore,—who could not fail to know, and to share the anxieties and forebodings of his adorable tenant,—in fact, who made it his business—he had none other—to do

both, — was able to give some consolation on that head. There could have been no accident, or it would have appeared in the newspaper, and he must have seen it, for he read the paper diligently every morning. He never missed it. He read it through from the first birth at the beginning to the last auctioneer's advertisement at the end. There had been no railway or steamboat accident between London and Paris, since Mr. Wilford went away. How could there be—and the *Times* not know of it? And he not read it in the *Times*?

But if he should be ill! He was far from well when he went away. He might be ill—seriously ill—dying, perhaps; and she, Violet—his wife—who should be at his side, tending him, slaving for him,—was away, sepa-

rated from him by miles and miles, knowing nothing of what had happened. Oh, if this should be so—if he were to die, and she never to see him more! And the tears *would* come in passionate floods.

“Don’t take on, mum!” quoth the Rembrandt, comforting, “look at the blessed infant a-smiling in his sleep; a sweet flower. It will do your heart good to see him.” Then for her own benefit she muttered, “Drat the men! There never was one of ’em worth that pretty creetur’s tears. No, nor a brass farden neither.”

“Poor thing!” said Mr. Phillimore, meditatively, drawing at his gorgeous pipe, long after all trace of fire had died out of the beautiful china bowl. “Poor thing! Very sad indeed; but quite in the best Italian manner. A

‘Didone abandonata’ say; perhaps, something a little more Christian though. Very pale, but still very delicate in colour; pearly in tint, delightful in tone. What the devil is St. Joseph up to, I wonder? I can’t make it out at all.” And he paused for some time. “I know I should like to have the restoring of him.” He indulged in grim chuckles over this joke. “It would be done in the most approved fashion. The pumice-stone should be well rubbed in. By George—it should come very near flaying! I wouldn’t spare his glazing.”

A post-knock at the door.

Violet was on the stairs in a moment—her heart turbulently throbbing—her hopes raised high, only, however, to be the more depressed. The letter was for Mr. Phillimore.

“I’m sure she’s quite welcome to it if it would do her any good,” observed that gentleman, “but it won’t—I know that. It’s from Loafe. I never knew a man so perpetually in want of small change as he is. Poor Loafe. I suppose I must send to him. He’s very regular in his applications, quite as much so as the other taxes, or the water rate. It seems to me that his is the gin-and-water rate. Well, well! It’s a pleasant occupation to be always setting a man on his legs who’s always tumbling off them again. But why doesn’t St. Joseph write? A letter—a line even—would do her a great deal of good. A very small meal will save a starving man. I never felt more inclined to invent information; and I have a sort of passion to commit a forgery. I wish I could write

like St. Joseph. I'm sure that in this case fraud would be full of piety, just as in some others, piety is all fraud. Why doesn't he write to her? She'll be ill next, and the only thing to do her good will be news of St. Joseph."

Later in the day, a cab drew up at Mr. Phillimore's door. A veiled lady, in dark dress and mantle, desired to see Mrs. Wilford. Mr. Phillimore, from his shop window, inspected the visitor.

"Rather brown in tone," he said; "and I can't make out the drawing of her features, there's such a thick scumble of veil. What *can* she want with the Madonna? I don't understand this at all. One thing, *she* can hardly bring news from St. Joseph." But Mr. Phillimore was wrong.

Regine stood in the presence of Violet.

The Rembrandt ushered her into the drawing room, and withdrew.

“So this, then,” murmured Regine, “is the woman he loves!” and she lifted her thick veil to see the better.

There was some hurry and nervousness in her manner—perhaps she was alarmed and regretful now for what she had done—perhaps she was abashed at the purity of the pale face before her, the lustre of the dark grey eyes fixed inquiringly, searchingly upon her.

“Yes, it is true—they said aright. She is beautiful. He does well to love her!”

And she sighed, lowering her head, pressing her hands upon her breast.

“What is it?—who is it, you seek?” asked Violet, and in the depth of her heart she began to feel some strange emotions stirring—a presage of coming

trouble weighing heavily upon her. She gazed into Regine's eyes, as though to pierce through their midnight mystery, and read the truth beyond.

By what magic is it that one woman is able on the instant to appraise another to the uttermost—to pluck away her every disguise—to discover the brand upon her, though it be painted over an inch thick? By what strange innate process of perception was it that Violet knew at once that there was some impassable gulf severing her from this woman Regine—that they must ever stand apart—dangerous to each other—enemies perhaps—friends never?

“Who are you?” she asked, and Regine seemed to cower at the tones of her voice.

“I have wished to see you,” she

whispered, hoarsely, hesitatingly; "to see *his* wife, *his* child,"—and she stopped.

"What! You know *him*?—you come from him?" and Violet stretched out her trembling hands in an agony of anxiety.

"Pardon me—let me go. I did wrong to come here. What would he say if he knew?"

Regine was speaking abstractedly. She was hardly conscious of her words.

"You know him?" Violet asked again: and this time with a painful feeling of injury,—with a dreadful thought weighing upon her breast.

Regine made no answer.

"What can you know of him?" and Violet, as though recollecting herself, drew back. "What can *you* know

of him?—what can *you* know of my husband? ”

There was something almost cruel in the severity with which she put these questions.

“Your husband!” Regine echoed, and her dense eyebrows came down heavily—her bosom heaved,—signs of an impending storm of anger. But she subdued this: her hands twisting, as though she were wrestling with it bodily. “Well, yes, *your* husband,”—a pause; “and that—is that your child?—*his* child?”

She was advancing to where the child, wreathed in shawls, lay curled upon the sofa. Quickly Violet interposed. She was angry, and very pale now in the presence of her strange visitor,—just as the red bezoart in a ring of old turned to the light hue

of opal when brought near to poison. She stood between her child and Regine, guarding it as from the shadow of Evil, with one arm outstretched, to keep at a distance her foe,—for so she felt, she knew Regine to be.

“I may not see it?”

“No. There is some mistake, I think. I have misunderstood. I thought perhaps that you brought me news of—of Wilford—my husband.”

“Well, why should I not?”

“You do not,” Violet said coldly; and she turned away to soothe her child,—it had stirred in its sleep. Regine bit her lips till the blood started; her white teeth were stained with it.

“Why should I not bring news of him?” she cried harshly, noisily.

“There is some mistake—you are

wrong. Pray leave me. I cannot hear of him from *you*." And Violet pointed to the door. "Pray go. You should not have intruded here."

How her ice-cold tones seem to madden the other woman!

"It is you who are wrong! Why should I not bring news of him? I, who have seen him but now,—left him within the hour."

"That cannot be. He is in Paris."

Violet, trembling, alarmed in spite of herself, leant against the back of the sofa, still guarding her child.

"In Paris!" cried Regine, with a shrill, hard laugh.

"He left London on Monday night," Violet said, with a persistence that was almost mechanical.

Regine laughed again; then, struck by the strange expression on Violet's white

face, her colourless lips, her shivering, tottering figure,—she stopped in her cruel mirth, and seemed about to advance, as though to save her from falling.

Violet perceived the intention, recovered herself with evident effort, and stood again defiantly before her visitor; but she could not trust herself to speak.

“What if he has never quitted London? What if he has tricked you?”

“He would not do so,” she said at last, very softly.

“You have great faith in him? You have great trust in his truth—in his love?”

“He is my husband!” Violet said, simply.

Again Regine raised her shrill laugh. Violet closed her eyes, as though in pain.

“Are husbands always so true? Do they never lie—cheat, trick, do you think?” Regine asked, savagely. “Is he better than the rest? Why should he be? What do you know of him? He loves you, you will say. Yes. I see the words upon your lips. A man’s love!—another word for a lie, I tell you. Has he never loved another? Bah!”

“How dare you say this to me?” cried Violet, passionately. “How dare you speak thus of my husband?”

“You love this Monsieur Wilford very much?”

“Yes. I love him. Know *that* when you speak ill of him; know that that love shields him, and striking against it, your charges fall off harmless—blunted. And now go. I will not listen more to you. You should

choose better than to speak ill of a husband to a wife who loves him. I am secure in my love—in his—go!”

“Love! husband! wife! always these words! Is there magic in them, do you think? I can disperse it at a word—at a breath. I know this Monsieur Wilford well—in the past—long ago. I know him well, I say. Have you ever asked him of the past? Do you believe his love came to you so whole and true? Folly! He has loved before he loved you! I say this, Madame Violet—I who know it—who have a right to say it! Why should I not?—ay, even to you, his wife, as you say. Are you so sure of your right to the title?”

“How dare you say this to me?”

“Dare? There are many things I dare do. Take care. I can pay back scorn for scorn—wrong for wrong.

Don't rouse me too much. I can be like a mad creature, I know that. Take care. I don't wish to injure you—I will not, if I can help it; only in my passion I don't know what I do. I did not come here to say these things. Don't make me hunger to injure you—don't, for your own sake—for mine."

"You will go!" said Violet, and she moved to ring the bell; but Regine stopped her with some fierceness.

"One moment, and I go. Will you hear me?"

"No."

"Will you not listen to the truth? This man, whom you love—who you think loves you—this Wilford—listen, I say, to the truth——"

For Violet had swept away, holding her hands to her ears as though to shut out the sound of the woman's voice.

"I cannot—I will not believe you,—not when you speak against him."

"It is truth that I tell you."

"It is falsehood."

"What!" cried Regine, quivering with rage, "you will not believe?—you will not trust your ears?—you love him so much! Trust your eyes then!" She tore from her bosom a packet of papers—her trembling fingers could barely hold them—"Will you believe this—and this—and this—his letters to another? To another? What do I say? To *me*—letters full of love, devotion. You know the hand? Yes, I see you do." She turned the papers over with angry haste, tearing some of them in her eagerness. "Will you believe *now* in the truth of your husband? Husband?—bah! See here before you the proof of his marriage to another,—who lives

still—whose claim is of an older date than yours—who is here—here now, at this moment, to assert her claim! *Now* will you hear? Will you believe?"

More she said—outpouring the vials of her fury upon the head of Violet,—a torrent of confused, wrathful words, questions, charges, scorn, laughter—flourishing the papers which were to prove her statements—forcing them upon Violet, and compelling her to see and believe,—to read them and know their genuineness.

Poor Violet! what a scared, white face she turned upon her dreadful visitor!

"It is false—all false!" she said, repeating that cry at intervals,—interrupting Regine's bursts of passion.

"It is false—all false!"—clinging to that belief against reason, hope, unquestionable proof.

Even Regine paused at length, struck by this wonderful pertinacity.

“It is false—all false!” cried the poor woman. She grew hoarse with the cry—her voice broke with it—yet still she gazed defiantly upon her enemy, —still she pointed with a shaking hand to the door, and bade her begone.

Yet was her enemy lashed to one more explosion of passion. Clutching her shoulder, dragging her closer, that she should hear to the uttermost syllable, Regine hissed into Violet’s ear,

“You are no wife, and your child——!” The sentence died out in a hoarse whisper. Violet fell upon her knees, as though struck by a mortal blow. A moan of agony stole from her white lips.

“God forgive me!” cried Regine, conscious at last of her cruelty, and re-

pentant in a measure, "I did not think to wound her so. Oh! if Wilford knew, he would kill me!"

She stood for a moment irresolute; should she go?—should she render assistance? She hardly yet knew the extent of Violet's fortitude.

Painfully, slowly, the poor woman drew herself up—her eyes wide open—fixed upon Regine in a stare that had something terrible in it.

At length she stood erect again: still guarding her child, separating it from Regine.

"It is false!"

She uttered the words with a brave effort—clearly, firmly, commandingly,—never faltering in her fixed gaze upon her foe.

"Now go!" and again she pointed to the door.

Regine quailed. She moved as though

about to speak—to express regret, it might be, at what she had done. She could not sustain the fixed, scornful glare of the beautiful grey eyes, whose softness now had yielded to a fire that was fierce in its intensity. She moved almost in involuntary obedience to the imperious gesture of Violet.

With bowed head she left the presence of the mother and the child, passed slowly down the stairs, out of the house into the street.

“What have I done?” she asked herself; and she pressed both hands upon her forehead.

“What have I done?” she went on murmuring. “I am going mad, I think. I *am* mad—must be mad to have done what I have done,—to have said what I have said. Oh! he will never forgive me now—never, never, never.”

And she sobbed passionately as she passed along the streets, heeding little enough the comments of bystanders and passengers,—the amusement or the marvel she was to them.

“Yes, yes, she is a noble woman: she is worthy of his love. I see *that*—I know *that*, though I hate her with all my heart—hate her with all my heart and soul!”

You would have believed her if you had heard her say these words,—had marked the energy with which she poured them forth, and the fierce scowl of her jet eyebrows.

“And she loves him—one can see that,—she loves him! Yes, poor woman! Why did I treat her so? And she is loved, yes, she is loved; it must be so. He loves her, and he will never forgive me. O God! what have I done?—

what have I done? I wish I were dead—dead—dead—a hundred times over!”

Did it matter to her—in her sorrow, passion, her remorse, as these alternately tortured her—that the people she met in the streets turned round to look at her?

That one person leaning against a lamp-post was more especially amused—quite shook with laughter, clasping his lean sides, laughed audibly, noisily—a not pleasant laugh to hear—discordant, acrid, cruel,—that this person was young, un-English looking, and wore a French cap with a peak?

“She has taken her departure, then,” noted Mr. Phillimore, peeping over the green baize in his window; “the lady with the thick scumble of veil over her face. What does she come here for?”

Who is she? What does she want with my Madonna? No good, no! In the Fine Arts the good people are also blondes. She's too dark,—too low in tone, a great deal. There's no nimbus round *her* head; I know that. But what did she want? There was the sound of talking, much talking, angry talking. Yes, and moving about—quarrelling, I should say; a great deal of noise."

He stopped suddenly.

"Yes, and there's more noise!"

A strange, wild scream ran through the house, and then came the dull sound as of some one falling heavily upon the floor of the room above.

"The Madonna!" cried Mr. Phillimore. "The Madonna! The poor Madonna! What can have happened?"

He darted from the room, up the stairs.

“Sally, Sally! quick, quick — come here!”

“Lawks a mercy me, what’s the matter?” responded the Rembrandt.

In another minute they were bending over the figure of Violet, stretched senseless upon the floor beside the couch on which her child lay sleeping.

Poor Violet!

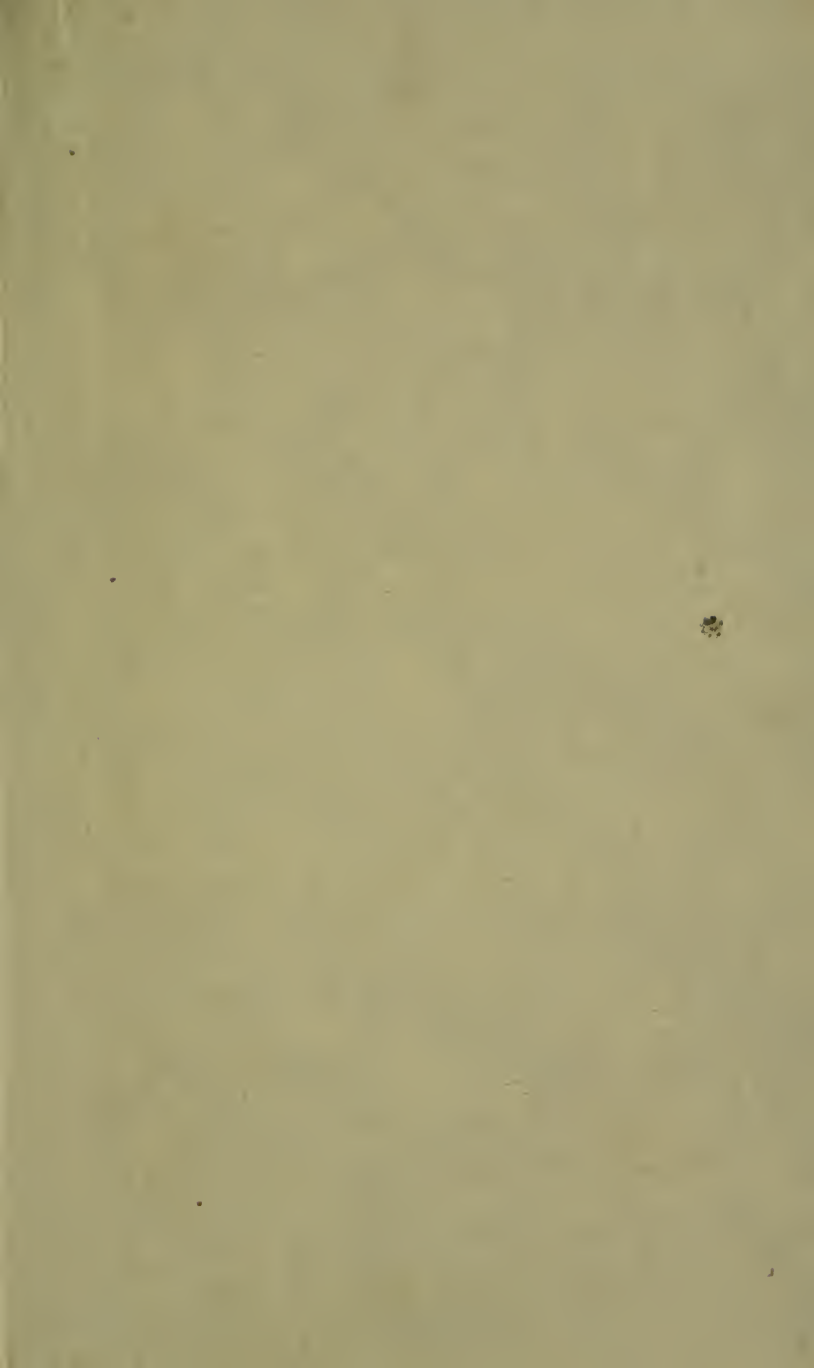
“Oh, if she should be dead!” groaned the picture dealer, “if she should be dead! Sally, say something—say that she isn’t dead!”

END OF VOL. II.

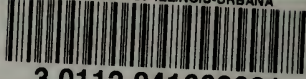








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